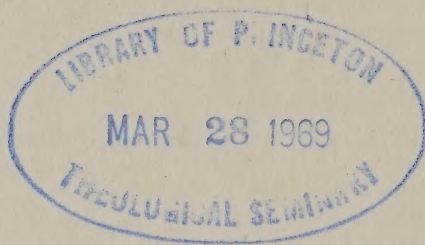


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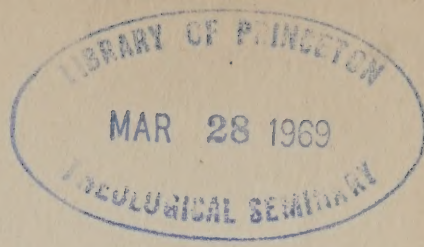
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THE CHARACTERIZATION OF PILATE  
IN THE  
TOWNELEY PLAYS









THE CHARACTERIZATION  
OF  
P I L A T E  
IN THE  
TOWNELEY PLAYS

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✓  
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## PREFACE

Several years ago, while teaching a course in medieval English drama, I was struck with the dramatic impressiveness of the characterization of Pilate in the Towneley Plays. As I read more widely in medieval drama, the feeling that the Towneley Pilate was unique grew upon me. The material which had to be brought to bear on a study of the characterization of Pilate likewise grew. Hence the article originally planned has become a monograph.

It seemed to me that the characterization of Pilate in Towneley had to be approached from at least four points of view: literary heritage, dramatic structure, social satire, and textual problems. Such a procedure inevitably means a certain amount of repetition and overlapping. I have not been able to avoid analyzing the same speech or situation several times for different purposes. It has also sometimes seemed better to repeat information or opinions already given than inflict on the reader the physical annoyance of constantly turning back and forth in the pages to pursue cross references.

In producing the following study, slight as it may seem, I have received material help from several sources. In particular I am glad to express my thanks to these:

To my colleagues, Lawrence Babb and Townsend Rich, for reading the manuscript and for suggestions for improving it.

To Professor George R. Coffman and to Professor R. L. Ramsay, both of whom gave me the benefit of their mature scholarship.

To the staff of the Michigan State College Press, especially to William Mitchell Trevarrow and Mary Edwards, for seeing the work through press.

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To the All College Research Committee of Michigan State College for grants which made the research possible.

To the staffs of libraries of the University of Toronto, the University of Michigan, and the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies for the use of their facilities.

My greatest debt is to one long dead, to John Scott, a fellow gradu-

ate student over fifteen years ago, whose brilliant thesis gave this study its direction. Had he lived, he would have done it earlier and better than I have.



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## INTRODUCTION

Coming to us in a unique manuscript of the second half of the fifteenth century, the Towneley Plays have much in common with the three other extant cycles of scriptural drama in Middle English, the York, the Chester, and the *Ludus Coventriae*. The general scope and dramatic organization of all four cycles are similar. All present the whole story of mankind from the creation of the world to doomsday.

The material of all four cycles is the Old and New Testaments as interpreted and elaborated by scriptural commentary, devotional writings, and legend. The Old Testament plays of all four cycles, beginning with the creation and including such incidents as the fall of the angels, the creation and fall of man, Cain and Abel, Noah's flood, and the sacrifice of Isaac, are preparation for the dramatized life of Christ, which occupies the central position in all the cycles. Plays dealing with the annunciation, the nativity, and the public ministry of Christ come to a climax in the group of plays which represent the passion and the crucifixion. Following these come the harrowing of hell, the resurrection, and the ascension. All four cycles close with a play of the final judgment. As devils carry off the sinners to eternal torment, Christ summons the virtuous to everlasting bliss, and the cycle closes, having performed its function of explaining the ultimate meaning of human life and human history. In following this scheme Towneley is like the three other extant cycles, and evidence indicates that many non-extant cycles also pursued about the same course.

Towneley is also like the Chester and York Cycles and several non-extant cycles of which we have records in the conditions of its presentation. It seems to have been played by the craft guilds of a town, for the manuscript preserves indications of the guild which played some of the plays. Towneley is unlike York and Chester in that we do not know for certain where the cycle was presented. What evidence there is points to the West Riding town of Wakefield as the home of the Towneley Cycle, but, though students of the cycle have commonly

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accepted the ascription to Wakefield as probable, the question cannot be regarded as finally settled.

If the Towneley Cycle resembles the other extant cycles in most material features, it is, in the opinion of most critics, clearly superior to them in literary quality. Most students would agree that Towneley marks the high tide of dramatic achievement in medieval England. Though other cycles and certain independent or detached plays have their merits, the Towneley Plays clearly excel all others in sustained characterization, dramatic structure, and humanity.

Most critics would credit an unknown genius, usually called the "Wakefield Master," with Towneley's superiority. This unidentified dramatist contributed five full plays and portions of several others to the cycle, his work being approximately one-fourth of the whole. One of his plays, the *Second Shepherds' Play*, is commonly given the distinction of being the most notable thing in English medieval drama. The combination of sharp characterization, brisk movement, boisterous humor, and biting social satire which the Wakefield Master achieves certainly elevates his work to a position beside that of Chaucer and *Piers Plowman*. Perhaps for this reason a great deal of the scholarly work on the Towneley Cycle centers around the work of the Master. Almost all the remainder is devoted to the vexing problems of composition.

In a way, this is unfortunate. Towneley has other excellencies than those contributed by the Master and other problems than those of composition. Too exclusive attention to the *Second Shepherds' Play* is particularly misleading. Fine as are its social satire and rough humor, it is nevertheless not completely functional. Its sole dramatic purpose, the annunciation of the birth of the Savior to the shepherds, is served in the last hundred lines. Otherwise, the play does not contribute to the over-all purpose of scriptural drama: to present the great scheme of man's salvation from creation to doomsday. Of course, the *Second Shepherds' Play* is valuable comic relief; and even if it could be defended in no way as a part of a cycle, still medieval literature would be the poorer without it.



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Nevertheless, from too great preoccupation with this single play come two mistaken attitudes. One is that the scriptural story and the religious intent of the craft cycles were strait-jackets which the authors were forever trying to wriggle out of. The other is that the chief contribution of medieval drama was to the development of comedy; its achievements in tragedy are negligible, and Elizabethan tragedy thus lacks the long dramatic development which precedes Elizabethan comedy.

The following study is intended as a corrective for both these notions. Occupied with the characterization of Pilate in the Towneley Cycle, it deals with portions of the cycle which are not exclusively the Master's, which are tragic rather than comic in tone and intent, and which are central to the whole end and purpose of scriptural drama. In addition, this study attempts to call attention to a rather neglected excellency of the Towneley Plays.

From the earliest and briefest liturgical representation of the passion of Christ to the most elaborate of the late French and German passion plays, Pontius Pilate is a leading character. As the judge who condemns Jesus, he plays a cardinal role in the great climax of the drama of salvation. Basically scriptural, his character is greatly developed in apocrypha and legend, so that the dramatist who handles Pilate is both aided by abundance of material and hampered by numerous traditional requirements and tabus.

Moreover, the characterization of Pilate poses perhaps the greatest problems in dramaturgy to be found in the whole range of scriptural drama. Most of the characters in craft cycles are simply and clearly either heroes or villains: God and Lucifer, Cain and Abel, Moses and Pharaoh; the saved and the damned souls. Especially is this true in the passion story. On one side are Jesus, Mary, John; on the other Annas, Caiaphas, Judas. The most notable exception to this clear dramatic dichotomy is Pilate. As the judge who tried to save Jesus he is on God's side; as the judge who finally condemned Jesus he is on the devil's side. In both scripture and legend Pilate's character and motives

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are enigmatic, confused, and contradictory. Is he merely weak? Is he caught in an inescapable conflict between personal desire to save Jesus and the responsibilities of a Roman official? Is his apparent friendship for Jesus merely feigned? Is he, in fact, really as anxious as Annas and Caiaphas to see a disturber of the peace crucified? Is he sincere or cynical?

The wealth of material about Pilate, especially the existence of two conflicting interpretations of his character, had an unfortunate result. Most medieval plays about the passion fail to give a clear and credible characterization of Pilate. Frequently he is lost in the multiplicity of persons and incidents that crowd the stage, or his motives do not emerge from his actions, or these actions are inconsistent with one another. It is not the least of the merits of Towneley that its Pilate is clearly conceived and vividly presented. A whole group of plays is so constructed as to develop Pilate as the most important character, after Christ, in the passion. The Pilate of Towneley is the antagonist. Into his creation is poured a full measure of the vitality so characteristic of the great Elizabethan villains.

The achievement of so vivid a dramatic effect as the Towneley characterization of Pilate cannot be the result of chance. Yet textual critics give little room to doubt that the Towneley Cycle as a whole, and the passion group in particular, is a patchwork. One of the plays in which Pilate appears is definitely identical with the York Play on the same subject. Others seem to consist of several layers, the origin of which is still uncertain. The fundamental problem to which the following study addresses itself is the examination of the dramatic achievement of the Towneley characterization of Pilate and the explanation of this achievement in the light of the findings of the textual critics.

To get as much light as possible on the problem, I shall in the following pages examine in detail the literary heritage absorbed in the Pilate plays of Towneley, analyze the dramatic structure of these plays, look at the social attitudes implicit in them, and attempt to reconcile the unity of effect with the diversity of authorship proved



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by the textual critics. At first glance, this procedure appears too elaborate and exhaustive for a part of one cycle of medieval scriptural plays. It holds out, however, the prospect of a suitable reward: a truer understanding of the level of artistry attained by the English scriptural drama at its best.





## I. PILATE IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE: HERITAGE AND TRADITION

In assaying the originality of the Towneley characterization of Pilate, one begins naturally with a survey of the materials available as sources. In addition to documents which may strictly be regarded as sources, proximate or remote, there is also a large number of treatments of Pilate in French and German plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although most of these are too late to be sources for Towneley, they illuminate both conventional attitudes towards Pilate and dramaturgic problems involved in the creation of a convincing characterization. This complex heritage, which was already formed before the creators of the Towneley Pilate set pen to paper, is perhaps the best yardstick for measuring their artistic achievement.

The late medieval author handling the subject of the passion did not need to rely on the bare scriptural account of the four gospels. Apocrypha and legend, commentary and pseudo-history provided abundance of material for extensive additions to the biblical narrative. The passion story had been elaborated by the development of minor characters like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and the invention of incidents like the refusal of the blacksmith to forge nails for the crucifixion and the healing of the blind Longinus by the blood that flowed from Jesus' side when it was pierced with a lance.

A very considerable elaboration centered about Pilate. Around this important, though sketchily characterized, figure grew up a great mass of legend, much of it contradictory. In fact, it is well at the outset to distinguish two groups of Pilate legends. One is conceived with the intention of justifying Pilate, or at least mitigating his fault. The other has the opposite purpose of depicting Pilate as a monster with a criminal past and a horrible end. We may call these diverse legends that of the "good" Pilate and that of the "evil" Pilate.

The attempt to excuse Pilate as far as possible began very early and is probably a reflection of early Christianity's turning from the Jews

to the Gentiles. The development of a sympathetic attitude towards Pilate can be traced even in the canonical gospels. In Mark, the earliest gospel, Pilate shows a reluctance to condemn Jesus (15:2-15), but yields to pressure "to satisfy the people." Matthew strengthens Pilate's reluctance by the account of the dream of Pilate's wife (27:19). The Pilate of Luke attempts to save Jesus by sending him to Herod (23:5-7, 14-15). In John, the last of the gospels, Pilate's reluctance is greatly emphasized. He holds out against the high priests until they threaten to denounce him to Caesar: "If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend" (19:12).<sup>1</sup>

The apocryphal Gospel of Peter (second century) goes still further. It relieves Pilate of all responsibility for the crucifixion. When his attempt to save Jesus fails, he entirely withdraws himself from the proceedings. Herod and the Jewish authorities are the sole judges. Throughout, Pilate shows strong Christian sympathies. After the resurrection he declares himself guiltless of the blood of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Several of the fathers and three apocryphal accounts continue this exculpation of Pilate. Lactantius speaks of Pilate's being overcome by the clamor of the Jews, the instigation of Herod, and fear for the power of the state — in other words, he was the dupe of his advisors.<sup>3</sup> Tertullian calls him "already a Christian in his heart" when, somewhat after the resurrection, he informed Tiberius Caesar what had happened.<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, Orosius, and Gregory of Tours all have this story that Pilate sent to Tiberius a detailed account of the crucifixion which was Christian in tone.<sup>5</sup> Pilate's wife, Claudia Procula (or Procla or Percula), was often considered a saint, for instance by Origen.<sup>6</sup> The

1. Findlay, *Byways in Early Christian Literature*, pp. 105-07.

2. In Lightfoot, *Excluded Books of the New Testament*, pp. 111-17; and Robinson and James, *The Gospel According to Peter and The Revelation of Peter*, pp. 16-17.

3. *Divinarum institutionum*, IV, xviii (MPL, VI, col. 504).

4. *Apologeticus adversus gentes* (MPL, I, col. 461).

5. Eusebius, *Chronicorum*, A. C., 38 (MPG, XIX, cols. 537-38); Orosius, *Historia*, VII, iv (MPL, XXXI, cols. 1066-67); Gregory of Tours, *Historia*, I, xxiii (MPL, LXXI, col. 172). Cp. Duriez, *La Théologie*, p. 406.

6. In *Matthaeum* (MPG, XIII, cols. 1773-74). According to Creizenach, "Legenden," p. 98, Procula is often identified with the Claudia of II Timothy 4:21.



Ethiopian Church celebrates June 25 as the feast of Procula and Pilate.<sup>7</sup>

No fewer than three apocrypha present this view of Pilate. It is, of course, from these or similar documents that Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, Orosius, and Gregory of Tours derive their information. The Latin *Gospel of Nicodemus* ends with a letter of Pilate to the Emperor admitting his mistake. The chief priests of the Jews were envious of Jesus and misrepresented him as a magician. Pilate, believing them, delivered Jesus up to be scourged and crucified.<sup>8</sup> The *Letter of Pilate to Herod* tells how Pilate, hearing that Jesus is risen, sends his wife Procula, the centurion, and Longinus, all of whom are convinced of Jesus' divinity, to gain information. Pilate then puts on a garment of mourning and testifies that Herod constrained him to judge and scourge Jesus. Finally, Pilate seeks out Jesus, and, falling at his feet, confesses his sin and adores Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus tells Pilate and his companions that they have seen the Son of Man, whom all the righteous fathers desired to see but were denied.<sup>9</sup>

The *Paradosis Pilati*, or *Trial and Condemnation of Pilate*, goes further still. Caesar calls Pilate to account for yielding to the demands of the Jews and condemning an innocent man. After commanding that the Jews be enslaved and driven out of Judea, Caesar condemns Pilate to decapitation for the great crime of judging an innocent man to the cross. Pilate prays for forgiveness. Though he receives none from Caesar, a voice from heaven assures him that "all generations and the families of the Gentiles shall call thee blessed, because under thee were fulfilled all those things that were spoken by the prophets concerning me." The Prefect cuts off Pilate's head and an angel receives it. Procula dies and is buried beside her husband.<sup>10</sup>

This legend of the good Pilate has left extensive marks on medieval drama. Aside from the numerous Pilates who are not dramatically

7. Barnes, "Pilate," *Catholic Encyclopedia*; Maskell, *Notes and Queries*; 6th Series, XI (May 16, 1885), p. 384.

8. Cowper, *Apocryphal Books*, pp. 370-71. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, VIII, cxxii, reproduces the letter.

9. Cowper, pp. 393-97.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 410-14.

realized at all and only go through the motions assigned the character in the gospels, the vast majority of all Pilates in medieval drama are sympathetically treated. Rarely, however, is the characterization completely consistent. It is nevertheless fair to say that most medieval dramatic accounts of the passion do not present Pilate as a villain. That role is reserved for the Jewish high priests and their henchmen. At worst, Pilate is a weakling who, though kindly towards Jesus, is driven, by fear of his position, to condemning Jesus. Such expressions as "guter mann"<sup>11</sup> "sant homs,"<sup>12</sup> "amis Jhesu,"<sup>13</sup> and "vostre saulveur,"<sup>14</sup> are frequently used by the Pilates of French and German plays to describe Jesus.

Often the efforts of Pilate to save Jesus are portrayed in great detail and at almost agonizing length. The York passion group, the French *Palatinus*, and the German *Egerer* are especially notable in this respect.<sup>15</sup> Early in the trial, Pilate is apt to announce his determination not to condemn Jesus, as for instance in *Palatinus*:

Par foy, Juïs, trop vous hatez  
Il ne mourra mie per moy.<sup>16</sup>

Then begins a long duel between the Jews and Pilate. The trial before Herod, the offer to release a prisoner for the passover, even the scourging are but efforts of Pilate to delay and thus wear out the Jews. In *Arras* and *Brixner* Pilate explicitly states that his only reason for ordering the scourging is to save Jesus' life:

Was laids er euch hat getan,  
Da werd ier wol gerochen an.  
Ier Juden, last in also darum kumen,  
Das im sein leben nit werd genumen.<sup>17</sup>

When Pilate has had to yield to the threat that if he frees Jesus his

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11. *Egerer*, l. 5166; *Alsfelder*, l. 3988; *Heidelberger*, l. 4607; *St. Galler*, l. 1069.

12. *Biard*, l. 781.

13. *Palatinus*, l. 334.

14. *Greban*, l. 22663.

15. Cf. Creizenach, "Legenden," pp. 93-94.

16. Ll. 348-49.

17. *Brixner*, ll. 1904-07. Cp. *Arras*, ll. 14269-74.



disloyalty will be reported to Caesar, Pilate frequently justifies himself. In *Brixner*, his sentence is a long and bitter denunciation of the Jews.<sup>18</sup> In the *Passion de Biard* Pilate makes a speech of nearly a hundred lines explaining and defending his acts to Joseph of Arimathea. It was altogether the fault of the Jews, Pilate says. He himself wanted to deliver Jesus but could do nothing:

Et saichés que me poisse fort  
De ce que les Juifz l'on mys a mort,  
Et saichés de voir sen mantir  
Qu'onque sa mort ne porchaisser,  
Mais le delivrer il me plaisoit.<sup>19</sup>

After the signs and wonders that accompanied the crucifixion Pilate is frequently convinced that Jesus was the Son of God, or at least a just man, and that great wrong has been done. Thus, the *Egerer* Pilate, when he hears of the resurrection, reminds the Jews that he warned them and confesses that now he knows Jesus is the Son of God:

Ich sagt euch for und auch sindt,  
Sein blut ge über euch und eure kindt.  
Erstanden ist Jhesus, gottes sonn!<sup>20</sup>

In *Alsfelder* Pilate is likewise convinced of Jesus' divinity, even though later he bribes the soldiers to remain silent about the resurrection.<sup>21</sup> In *Greban*, Pilate is convinced he has done a great injustice. The Jews have made him condemn an innocent man:

tu m'as fait faire ung jugement  
dessus l'innocent et le juste  
le plus faulx et le plus injuste  
qu'oncques juge sentencia.<sup>22</sup>

18. Ll. 2237-88.

19. Ll. 1517-21. Cf. *Anglo-Norman Resurreccion*, P, ll. 57-64, C, ll. 69-80; *Greban*, ll. 26732-37; *Cornish Passion*, ll. 3125-28.

20. Ll. 7772-74.

21. Ll. 7424-27.

22. Ll. 30663-66.

It is, however, perhaps rather fear than any real contrition that motivates Pilate's repentance, for he adds that he has risked losing his office:

Pour complaire à ces faulx Juifz  
je me suis en ung danger mis  
d'estre privé de mon office.<sup>23</sup>

After the crucifixion Pilate sometimes refuses to have anything to do with guarding the tomb. In the simplest form, this refusal is a mere following of the account in Matthew: "You have a guard: go, guard it as you know."<sup>24</sup> In several plays, however, this attitude is elaborated. The Pfarrkircher Pilate reminds the Jews that when Jesus was alive, they held His prophecies of no worth, now they fear that He spoke truth. And when the Jews reply that they fear that His disciples will steal the body and say He has risen, Pilate reminds them that if they had followed his advice they would not now be in trouble:

Hielt ier in lassen leben .  
Als ich ewch offt geraten hab,  
So wärt ier iecz der sorgen an.<sup>25</sup>

The Pilate of *Grablegung Christi* similarly puts the blame for whatever may happen on the Jews:

Er werd verhiet oder verstolen  
die sorg sij euch enpfolchen.<sup>26</sup>

The Pilates of *Alsfelder*, *Redentin*, and *Semur* mock the request of the Jews. What, will you guard a dead man? asks the *Redentin* Pilate.<sup>27</sup> In *Semur* Pilate stands by his decision not to set a guard but in *Alsfelder* and *Redentin*, he finally accedes to the insistence of the Jews, mainly to be rid of them, as the *Redentin* Pilate explains.<sup>28</sup> In

23. *Ibid.*, ll. 30678-80.

24. E.g. *Biard*, ll. 1759-60.

25. Ll. 2960-62.

26. Ll. 405-06.

27. Ll. 55-58.

28. *Alsfelder*, ll. 6871-80; *Redentin*, ll. 69-70.



both plays, as in Towneley and York (which are nearly identical), Pilate himself furnishes the guard, inspects it, and exhorts it to guard the tomb well.<sup>29</sup>

A great many plays contain no scene with Pilate after the resurrection. If the soldiers make any report, they make it to the Jews. In those plays in which Pilate appears, he is furious at the soldiers and anxious to conceal the news of the resurrection.<sup>30</sup> In *Redentin* Pilate orders the torture of the soldiers by the thumbscrew; in *Muri*, *Alsfelder*, and *Greban* he rages at the soldiers. As in Towneley and York, the Pilates of the Cornish *Resurrection*, *Muri*, *Wiener*, and *Alsfelder* either originate or quickly acquiesce in the suggestion that the soldiers be bribed. In *Redentin* and *Egerer*, the priests do the bribing, and Pilate immediately sees through the fraud when the soldiers report to him that they were overcome by the disciples. The *Redentin* Pilate points the unmistakable moral: The Jews are disgraced. They have done a foolish thing in procuring the death of Jesus. Now He is risen, they would like to hush it up. But they cannot; they will suffer eternally for their folly.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, though the characterizations of Pilate in medieval drama are generally sympathetic, they abound in inconsistencies. Most medieval passion plays — Towneley is the great exception — seem caught between two interpretations of Pilate's character, a good and an evil. Basically, the cause of the inconsistency is the nature of the material, but the sharpness of the conflict in interpretation owes much to the existence, alongside the tradition of the good Pilate, of a legend which made him the bastard son of a miller's daughter, who lived by murder and fraud and died a suicide. Elaborately worked out, plausible, and widely disseminated, this legend of the evil Pilate must have been known to a great many of the authors of passion plays.

King Atus (or Tirus in some versions), the story goes, had a son by Pila, a miller's daughter. Pila named the boy by joining her own name

29. Also *Innsbrucker*, *Muri*. Cp. Duriez, *La Théologie*, p. 407.

30. Creizenach, "Legenden," pp. 93-94, says that Pilate is generally a determined enemy of the risen Jesus. I do not find this true. He often acts to save face, not from enmity.

31. Ll. 1016-41.

to that of the King. Hence *Pilatus*. When Pilate was three, Pila sent him to King Atus, who had a legitimate son of the same age. The children were reared together. When they played, the legitimate son always won. This infuriated Pilate, who finally killed his half-brother. Though King Atus was grieved and his council decreed death for Pilate, the King was loath to slay his own son. Instead, he sent Pilate to Rome as a hostage. There Pilate met the son of the French king, became jealous of him and slew him. The Romans decided to make use of Pilate's evil talents by sending him as governor to the isle of Pontus, where the people were rebellious and unruly. Pilate proved the master shrew and quickly pacified the inhabitants. From the isle of Pontus, Pilate took his first name, Pontius. His success came to the ears of Herod, who brought him to Judea as High Justice. After making himself rich, Pilate went to Rome and secured the justiceship for life, against Herod's will. Hence the enmity between Herod and Pilate.

After the crucifixion, the Emperor was stricken with a fatal illness, often specified as leprosy. Learning of Jesus' power to heal the sick, the Emperor sent Volusian, his confidant, to Judea to bring back Jesus with him to Rome. On hearing Volusian's mission, Pilate procrastinated by asking fourteen days to find Jesus who, by this time, had ascended to heaven. Volusian, meanwhile, learned from Veronica that Pilate had condemned Jesus to death. However, Veronica's veil, with the face of Jesus imprinted on it, had magical powers, and the sight of it would cure the Emperor. Volusian offered to buy it. Veronica would not sell, but agreed to accompany Volusian to Rome and show the veil to the Emperor. Veronica's faith in the veil was justified. The sight of it cured the Emperor, and the veil is still to be seen in Rome.

Learning of Pilate's unjust judgment, the Emperor resolved to condemn him to a loathsome death. When summoned before the Emperor, Pilate played a trick. He wore Jesus' seamless coat, which preserved the wearer against all anger. Twice the Emperor called Pilate before him to be sentenced. Each time he was unable to pronounce sentence, but was forced to treat Pilate kindly. Everyone was puzzled,

including the Emperor, until Veronica told him about the seamless coat and advised stripping Pilate before summoning him to court. Divested of the magical coat, Pilate had no defense, and the Emperor carried out his intention.

Put into prison to await a horrible death, Pilate anticipated the execution by committing suicide with a knife. The Emperor decided that, since Pilate's suicide was against nature, the body should not be buried in a decent manner, but thrown into the Tiber. Although a stone was tied to the body, it would not sink. Devils gathered about it and made a tempest. The Romans then took the body out of the Tiber and threw it into the Rhone near Vienne, which they thought was the way to hell. Again, the water refused to receive the body. It was then taken to Lausanne, where the devils again stirred up a tumult. Finally, the body was buried in a pit in the hills. Devils still haunt the place and frighten people away.

This story, extremely widespread in the Middle Ages, existed in several versions available to the writers of craft plays.<sup>32</sup> The foregoing summary is based on the account in the *Stanzaic Life of Christ*.<sup>33</sup> Other versions of the story which could easily have served as sources for Towneley are found in Mirk's *Festial*,<sup>34</sup> the *Golden Legend*,<sup>35</sup> and Higden's *Polychronicon*.<sup>36</sup>

The legend of the evil Pilate crops up in drama from time to time. The Cornish *Resurrection* preserves the complete account of the Emperor's illness, Veronica's veil, the condemnation and suicide of Pilate, and the final disposition of the body. The last incident varies slightly

32. Creizenach, "Legenden," Baum, "Medieval Lives of Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate," *PMLA*, XXXI (1916), 481-632.

33. Ll. 6433-6816.

34. Pp. 120-21.

35. *Legenda aurea*; ed. Graesse, pp. 221-35.

36. IV, vi (Rolls Series, no. 41, vol. iv, pp. 317-25, 365). Pilate's suicide is often mentioned by patristic historians: Eusebius, *Historiae ecclesiasticae*, II, vii (MPG, XX, col. 155); Cassiodorus, *Chronicon* (MPL, LXIX, col. 1228); Prosperus Aquitanus, *Chronicon integrum*, pt. I (MPL, LI, col. 552); Orosius, *Historiarum*, VII, vi (MPL, XXXI, col. 1071). Gregory of Tours has an account of Pilate's message to Tiberius and his incarceration and suicide, *Historia francorum*, I, xxiii (MPL, XXI, cols. 172-73). These are of no especial value as sources, but they are important testimony to the early popularity of the legend.



from the version in the *Stanzaic Life* and elsewhere: the body is put on a ship and cast adrift. Devils claim it.<sup>37</sup> Two other late German passion plays, the *Frankfurter of 1493* and the *Heidelberger* (1513), have scenes clearly based on the legend of the evil Pilate, but altered in keeping with the general sympathetic treatment of Pilate of these plays. In these two plays, the Jews send an embassy to Caesar to appeal for his protection against Herod, who slaughters them like cattle. Granting their request, Caesar sends Pilate to Judea as Procurator because he has fitted himself for the task by his government of the Isle of Pontus. Receiving the staff and banner ("baculum et vexillum") from Caesar, Pilate sets out for Judea, where he is received joyously by the Jews. He voices his intention of judging righteously and governing well.<sup>38</sup>

Both York and Towneley have internal evidence that the legend of the evil Pilate was known to the authors. The York Pilate in his first speech alludes to the origin of his name:

Pounce Pilatt of thre partis  
þan is my propir name.<sup>39</sup>

The Towneley *Talents* contains a similar allusion to Pilate's birth. Pilate says

kyng atus gate me of pila.<sup>40</sup>

The allusion occurs in the boasting speech with which the play opens, which is in the nine-line stanza of the Master and hence may represent a late interpolation. The whole play, however, is not written in the nine-line stanza, and the whole play depends on the motif of the magical seamless coat, which, in the legend of evil Pilate, protected him from the wrath of the Emperor. The Towneley *Talents* is really the story of how the coat came into Pilate's possession. After the crucifixion, the three Torturers bring the clothes of Jesus to Pilate for division. Instead of cutting up the seamless coat, the Torturers throw

37. Ll. 1587-2360.

38. *Frankfurter 1493*, ll. 1128-1267; *Heidelberger*, ll. 927-1028. Cf. Froning, *Drama des Mittelalters*, I, 263.

39. York XXVI, 15-16.

40. L. 19.

dice for it. Pilate insists on being included in the game, and though his throw is beaten by that of the Third Torturer, he secures the garment by threats.

The First Torturer is quite explicit about the garment's properties:

ffor whosoeuer may get thise close,  
 he ther neuer rek where he gose,  
 ffor he semys nothyng to lose  
 If so be he theym were.<sup>41</sup>

The Third Torturer makes it plain that the coat is the especially precious item among the clothes:

Nomore now of this talkyng,  
 Bot the cause of my commyng;  
 Both on ernest and on hethyng  
 This cote I wold I had;  
 ffor if I myght this cote gett,  
 Then wold I both skyp and lepe,  
 And therto fast both drynke and ete,  
 In fayth, as I were mad.<sup>42</sup>

It seems highly probable that we are to understand that Pilate, too, appreciates the worth of the coat, and that his determination to get it, by fraud if he fails by fair means, is well motivated.

This story is undoubtedly an offshoot of the legend of the evil Pilate,<sup>43</sup> though its development may not have been the work of the author of the *Talents*. At least, there is an analogue in the French non-dramatic *Passion selon Gamaliel* (late fourteenth century?). Here the "Primus Tortor" of Towneley is named Malcus. He comes to Pilate protesting that his comrades want to cut in pieces the "belle gonelle" which they have taken from Jesus. Malcus wants to preserve the garment whole and to cast lots for it. Pilate decides in his favor. Malcus wins the garment and then sells it to Pilate.<sup>44</sup> The most conspicuous omission in this version is the magical properties of the coat.

41. Ll. 105-08.

42. Ll. 137-44.

43. Creizenach, *Geschichte*, I, 296, regards the business of the seamless coat as a memory of the legend.

44. In Roy, *Mystère de la passion*, II, 337.

In *Donaueschingen*, the soldiers dividing the clothes speak of the magical properties of the coat. As in Towneley and *Gamaliel*, Pilate gains possession of the coat, though by gift rather than by threat or purchase.<sup>45</sup> Though neither *Donaueschingen*, which is too late (1450) nor *Gamaliel* is a source for Towneley, we can perhaps infer the existence of a version of the legend known to all three which accounted for Pilate's possession of the seamless coat.

The evidence for direct borrowing by the passion group of Towneley from the legend of the evil Pilate is rather too slight for one to make much of it. Similarities of incident or motif are confined to two instances, both occurring in one play, which one critic regards as a late addition to the Towneley Cycle.<sup>46</sup> However, if we abandon the search for specific sources and influences and look at the general attitude towards Pilate which pervades both the legend of the evil Pilate and the Towneley passion group, it is hardly possible to deny that the legend is the background for the Towneley characterization of Pilate.

In addition to the legend, other documents contain bits of information about Pilate which portray him as a corrupt and tyrannical official. Both Josephus and Philo Judaeus have stories of Pilate's offending the Jews by requiring them to worship images. Philo is particularly suggestive: Pilate fears lest the Jews send an embassy to the Emperor Tiberius accusing him of corruption, insolence, rapine, and cruelty, especially of the frequent murders of people untried and uncondemned.<sup>47</sup> This portrayal of Pilate occasionally got into the patrology, and thence into medieval commentaries and histories. For instance, Ambrose regards Pilate as the type of venal judge who condemns those he knows to be innocent:

Similiter in hoc typum omnium iudicum arbitrar esse  
praemissum, qui damnaturi essent eos quos innoxios  
aestimarent.<sup>48</sup>

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45. Ll. 3345-62.

46. M. G. Frampton, "The *Processus Talentorum* (Towneley XXIV)," *PMLA*, LIX (1944), 646-54. See also below, p. 64.

47. Philo, "On the Virtues and Office of Ambassadors," *Works*, tr. Young, IV, 165; Josephus, *Jewish War*, II, 169-77.

48. *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, X (MPL, XV, col. 1829).



Vincent of Beauvais tells us that Pilate erected images in the Temple, refused to remove them at the entreaty of the Jews, and condemned to death all who would not acquiesce in his acts. Moreover, he stole money from the Korbanah, the Temple treasury, to build an aqueduct. He was accused by Vincellus, Praesides of Syria, and eventually committed suicide.<sup>49</sup>

Two French dramatic pieces, one rather early, the other late, contain characterizations of Pilate perfectly in keeping with the Towneley portrayal. The fragmentary *Anglo-Norman Resurreccion* (late twelfth century) shows Pilate as a hater of Christians, who, when he learns of the healing of Longinus, has him put in prison and forbids the soldiers to speak of the incident. His language to the soldiers is of a piece with that of the Towneley Pilate:

Tais, vassal, ja nul nel die.  
 Fantosme est, nel creez mie.  
 Ore comand que Longin seit pris  
 E ignelep as en chartre mis.  
 Alez tost, metez le en prison  
 Que ne voist prechant tel sermon.<sup>50</sup>

However, a hundred lines before, Pilate has explained to Joseph of Arimathea that he was forced to condemn Jesus only because he was afraid that the Jews in their hatred of Jesus would cause Pilate to lose his office.<sup>51</sup> The late *Passion de Jean Michel* (1486), which devotes a long scene to Pilate's history before the Crucifixion (though the only use of the Legend is an allusion by Herod to Pilate's low birth), portrays Pilate as a tyrant who ordered the Jews to worship the Emperor's image, increased their taxes, and massacred them for sacrificing beasts despite his command. The survivors of his cruelty complain to Herod, wherefore the enmity between Pilate and Herod.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps one should also add the Cornish *Passion* to the list of plays depicting Pilate as a tyrant. It has one very interesting similarity to

49. *Speculum historiale*, VIII, vi, cxxiv.

50. P, ll. 151-56; C, ll. 170-75.

51. Ll. 58-64.

52. Roy, II, 286-87.

Towneley. Aside from York, with which Towneley is undoubtedly connected, the Cornish *Passion* is the only one I have seen that suggests Pilate's participation in the plot of the Jews before the Passion. Like Towneley, and unlike York, the Cornish *Passion* shows Pilate as the motivating force behind the plot. Early in the play, Pilate, hearing of Jesus' preaching, fears that Jesus will "spoil the fair,"<sup>53</sup> and calls him "a false hypocrite."<sup>54</sup> When Caiaphas reports that Jesus has said he would rebuild the temple in three days, Pilate denies that he can.<sup>55</sup> Pilate is grieved that the people follow Jesus.<sup>56</sup> To Caiaphas' demand that Jesus should die, Pilate readily assents.<sup>57</sup> This inclusion of Pilate as one of the group who plot Jesus' death is extremely rare in medieval literature.

It must be remembered, however, that texts, such as we have been considering, give us only an imperfect understanding of the characterization of Pilate in the actual plays as performed. For an appreciation of the total effect we need to know how the part was played, what business was customary, the tone of voice and the mannerisms affected by the player of Pilate. Fortunately, we have some indications how Pilate was played. All English Pilates seem to have been ranters, who boasted of their prowess and threatened the crowd, in the same manner as Herod. At Coventry Pilate had as a property a villainous-looking green club; he was apparently the leading character in the plays in which he appeared, for, in 1490, he was paid four shillings, as against 3/6 for Caiaphas and Herod, eighteen pence for the devil and Judas, and even less for Christ.<sup>58</sup> So common was the characterization of Pilate as a raging tyrant that Chaucer could consider "Pilates voys" an adequate description of the cry of the drunken Miller.<sup>59</sup> All these details suggest that, at least in England, there was

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53. Ll. 358-60.

54. Ll. 375.

55. Ll. 378-92.

56. Ll. 439-42.

57. Ll. 443-54.

58. Sharp, *Dissertation*, p. 16; Gayley, *Plays of Our Forefathers*, p. 106.

59. "Miller's Prologue," A, 3124. "Pilates voys" may have a somewhat sharper connotation than usually recognized. In certain of the German passions Pilate is described as singing "alta voce," or "mit laute stimme." So far as I have observed only villains sing or speak their lines in a "high" voice: Cain, Caiaphas, Herod. Christ sings "media

an acting tradition of representing Pilate as a villain, or something approaching that. Such a tradition would naturally have affected the characterization of the Towneley Pilate.

How much can we learn about the genesis of the Towneley characterization of Pilate from this survey of possible sources, of the complex heritage of legend about Pilate, and of the development of acting traditions in the playing of the part? Certainly the specific sources for the Towneley passion group elude us. It is doubtful that we shall ever achieve better than informed guesses about the sources of any of the extant craft cycle plays. We can, however, assemble possible sources and thereby gain a knowledge of the kind of material with which the playwrights worked, filling in spots where possible sources are lacking by a general survey of the tradition and heritage. This I have sought to do. The treatments of Pilate, apocryphal, legendary, and quasi-historical, which would induce a playwright to create such a character as the Towneley Pilate are abundant. Everywhere one turns in the literature dealing with the passion are suggestions, incidents, motifs, and attitudes such as one finds in Towneley. The puzzle is not that the Towneley Pilate is such a consistent villain as that this characterization is unique in medieval drama.

What we can learn from analogous dramatic treatments of Pilate is all against the assumption that the Towneley Pilate is an independent artistic creation of entire originality. Despite the overwhelming prevalence of the good Pilate in medieval drama, not a single developed play, so far as I have observed, has a consistently sympathetic characterization of Pilate. Everywhere, the influence of the legend of the evil Pilate enters to mar the consistency of the opposite characterization. Many of the passion plays find themselves in the same difficulties as York, where Pilate's reluctance to condemn Jesus is reiterated over and over and the trial scenes are interminably drawn out while Pilate tries every subterfuge to deliver Jesus. Yet this same character is a cheat and a scoundrel in the scene

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voce," the angels "excelsa voce." This may be an indication that, whatever the text of the play may give Pilate as lines, the part was actually performed, even in those plays where the characterization seems to be sympathetic, as that of a villain. The evidence is, however, too scanty to be pushed very far.



of the Purchase of the Field of Blood (Play XXXII) and assents to the bribery of the soldiers in the Resurrection Play (Play XXXVIII).

The supreme achievement of Towneley is that there is no wavering between the two competing conceptions of Pilate's character. He is bad, all bad. The person or persons responsible for the Towneley passion group, as we have it, have made sure that no incident, even though of scriptural origin, is allowed to interfere with the dramatic consistency of the characterization, which is one of an Iago-like villain. The development of the Towneley passion group has not been marred, as has that of York and the major continental pieces of the fifteenth century, by the addition of extraneous comic matter or apocryphal incidents.

The Towneley method is the true dramatic method. Starting with a concept of Pilate as a tragic villain, not very different from the Machiavellian of Elizabethan drama, Towneley built up this character as a dramatic contrast to the suffering Christ. The original conception may well have come from the legend of the evil Pilate, from scattered bits in the fathers and the commentaries, and from an acting tradition. The effective development of this conception is a fascinating study in dramatic technique: in elimination of inconsistent and superfluous material, in focus and concentration, in the maintenance of appropriate tone.

## II. THE TOWNELEY PILATE: DRAMATIC STRUCTURE AND LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT

Broadly speaking, there are two methods by which a dramatist can develop character. The more apparent one is what the character says and does and what others say about him and do under his influence. The other is the structure of the play itself: the number of lines given to the character, the number and length of scenes which he dominates, the presence or absence of characters which compete for audience attention, the manner in which the lines of action converge or fail to converge on scenes in which the character plays a dominant part. All these considerations determine whether the play is so focussed as to make the character in question a major or a minor one, whether he emerges from the cast or is lost in it.

The easiest way to study the characterization of the Towneley Pilate is to compare him with other Pilates. As the judge who finally condemns Christ to the cross, Pilate naturally plays a prominent part in all passion plays. He has a generous share of the action in all four extant English cycles, in the Cornish *Passion* and *Resurrection*, and in Continental passion plays; and there are evidences of his importance in the non-extant English cycles. One can thus find abundant material for the comparison of the Towneley Pilate with the Pilates of other dramatists who wrote at approximately the same time, for the same purpose, and in the same tradition.

The Towneley Pilate appears in five plays: XX, the *Conspiracy*; XXII, the *Scourging*; XXIII, the *Crucifixion*; XXIV, the *Talents*; and XXVI, the *Resurrection*. There is also one important reference to Pilate in XXI, the *Buffeting*. The York Pilate appears in six plays, one more than the Towneley, but the total number of plays in the York passion group is eleven against Towneley's five, and the individual plays are shorter. Actually, then, the York Pilate is on the stage

somewhat less of the total time than the Towneley Pilate. Chester covers the passion in one long play and the resurrection in another, but Pilate's part is notably shorter than in either York or Towneley. The *Ludus Coventriae* and the Cornish *Passion* and *Resurrection*, because they differ in staging from Towneley, York, and Chester, cannot be analyzed on the same principle. The two *Ludus Coventriae* passion plays were performed continuously with the action moving from scaffold to scaffold in the manner of the later moralities. The two Cornish plays are likewise continuous, with groups of characters advancing as their time to play comes up and then retiring when they have played. However, with all these differences, the dramatic structure of the four extant English cycles and the two Cornish plays is roughly similar, and the part played by Pilate in each admits of comparison with the others.

Naturally, there is a central core of action and dialogue assigned to Pilate in all these plays, and in the Continental passion plays as well. Pilate has to perform the deeds and say the words which the four gospels give him. He has to say that he found no cause to condemn Jesus, to wash his hands and say "His blood be upon you," to condemn Jesus, to refuse to change the inscription over the cross, and so on. Tradition also assigned certain traits to Pilate which none of the craft dramatists felt free to alter. All English Pilates rant and threaten the crowd, all of them berate the soldiers who return with the news of the resurrection, and all bribe the soldiers to silence about the resurrection. These are the minimum essentials.

Beyond that, there is a wide variety in the treatment of Pilate. In the simple, epical treatment of the passion, Pilate has rather little to do. He must share the role of antagonist with Caiaphas, Annas, and Herod. When such necessary scenes as the last supper, the agony, the examination before Caiaphas and Annas, the carrying of the cross, and the crucifixion are allowed for, the action left for Pilate is rather meager, though, of course, it is sufficient in all the cycles to make him at least an important supporting character. But the amount of material covered in both Chester and *Ludus Coventriae* denies Pilate the opportunity to be a strong character. He is pretty well lost in the



shuffle. When, in addition to all the competition from characters like Annas, Caiaphas, Judas, and Herod, Pilate is represented as a weak, vacillating individual who has to be pushed to his decision by the Jews, the resulting character can hardly dominate any scene, even the condemnation of Christ. Though the simple religious intensity of the Chester passion and the stir and movement of *Ludus Coventriae* are impressive, one gets the sense that Christ is the only unifying figure. The Jews, Pilate, the torturers or soldiers, Herod — all take turns in the role of antagonist, and the result is a one-character-at-a-time organization such as Marlowe's *Edward II*, rather than the development by opposition and contrast of a Shakesperian tragedy.

The Cornish *Passion* marks a slight advance over Chester and *Ludus Coventriae* by giving Pilate a scene at the opening, in which, observing the results of Christ's preaching in the Temple, he fears the effect on the people and agrees with Caiaphas that the man should die.<sup>1</sup> Dramatically, this means that Pilate's character is being developed towards that of the antagonist, the active force behind the persecution of Christ. The Cornish playwright, however, failed to capitalize his opportunity, and when Christ is brought before Pilate later, there is no indication that Pilate has any previous knowledge of the man, the charge against him, or the conspiracy by which he was taken.

The York Play of the *Conspiracy* (XXVI), unlike the corresponding parts in Chester and *Ludus Coventriae*, makes Pilate a principal character. He is, if not a partner, at least a confidant in the plot against Christ from the very beginning. This is the right way to center the whole part of antagonist on Pilate, but the York playwright is apparently ignorant of the implications of his dramatic method. The York Pilate is among the kindest in medieval drama and one of the most anxious to save Jesus. Thus the situation is dramatically an awkward one. Pilate keeps protesting against the savage malice of the Jews, but it is Pilate who finally gives Judas the thirty pence. He has to alternate between protesting the groundless accusations which

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1. Cornish *Passion*, ll. 358-454.

Annas, Caiaphas, and the Doctors level against Jesus,<sup>2</sup> and believing them when they touch his own political power.<sup>3</sup> As a portrayal of a vacillating character, this has its point, but a vacillating character can scarcely be the antagonist. Moreover, the same charges are repeated in Play XXX (*Jesus before Pilate*), and in Plays XXXII and XXXIII (*Second Trial before Pilate*, divided into two plays). So long a suspension of decision is a bit wearying, and hard to believe even in Pilate.

To this the Towneley *Conspiracy* offers a contrast which is all the sharper because of the similarity of structure and incident between it and the corresponding York Play. The only substantial difference between the York and the Towneley *Conspiracy* is that York has a scene between the Janitor and Judas lacking in Towneley and that the character of Pilate in Towneley is strong rather than weak. These two differences, which could easily come from diverse rewritings of a common original, produce totally divergent lines of development.

The scene between the Janitor and Judas in York is rather grim low comedy. Judas enters and in a soliloquy motivates the action he is about to engage in. As treasurer of the band of disciples, he has been wont to steal one tenth of all income. At the house of Simon the Leper, a woman brought ointment worth three hundred pence. When Judas suggested that the ointment be sold and the proceeds given to the poor (minus Judas' tenth, of course), Jesus disagreed and allowed the woman to anoint Him with the ointment. Judas thus lost thirty pence, which is the reason for and the price of his betrayal.<sup>4</sup>

The soliloquy over, Judas knocks at the door of Pilate's hall. The Janitor will not admit him, because he is so grim. The Janitor sees treason in Judas' face, calls him a "bittil browed bribour." Judas alternately threatens and begs until the Janitor is persuaded to carry the request for audience to Pilate and the "duge peres." The total result of this scene of about seventy-five lines is to shift the action away from Pilate and to stop the play for a side issue.<sup>5</sup>

2. York XXVI, ll. 35-38, 287-90.

3. Ll. 117-19.

4. Towneley uses the same motivation for Judas, but it is presented more dramatically in a dialogue between Judas and Annas. It is also common in Continental plays: *Provençale*, *Egerer*, *Palatinus*, and *Ambroise*.

5. York XXVI, 127-204.

The Towneley *Conspiracy* uses the same material to better purpose. The Janitor's part is mostly transferred to Pilate, partially to Caiaphas and Annas. Judas suddenly appears without asking leave of anyone. Pilate is brusque and haughty. He calls Judas a harlot and bids him go hence. When Judas, who is portrayed as a cringing but persistent fellow, still remains, Pilate commands, "La hand on hym, and hurl him then." He has no time for Judas until he hears the offer of betrayal.

It is obvious that the Towneley handling of the material makes for concentration on the character of Pilate. Such concentration is possible without awkwardness only because the Towneley Pilate is an active, strong character instead of a weak and vacillating one. This characterization begins with the very first appearance of Pilate. The conventional boasting speech, common to both York and Towneley, is used in Towneley to give a valuable clue to Pilate's character. He commands peace and threatens the crowd with "this burnyshyd brande" and with "bryssynd of your bonys," if they make any disturbance. He magnifies his own glory. All this is conventional, but here Towneley takes leave of York and convention, for Pilate goes on to say that false indictors, questmongers, jurors, and false outriders — in other words, gentry on the shady side of the law — are welcome to him. He has heard of a "lurdan ledyr" praised as a prophet, but Pilate, though he fears the man, will destroy that "fature fals ihesus." Thus Pilate at the outset establishes himself as the prime mover in the conspiracy against Jesus. He, not the Jews, is the evil genius behind the crucifixion. With complete disregard of scripture but in obedience to principles of good dramaturgy, Towneley identifies Pilate with the Jews. Jesus, says Pilate, "if he lyf a yere / dystroy oure lawe must vs,"<sup>6</sup> and throughout the passion group Pilate uses the first person plural — "our laws," "our temple."<sup>7</sup>

The *Conspiracy* sets the tone and establishes the method of all that follows in Towneley. Pilate is always conceived as the antagonist in

6. Towneley *Conspiracy*, l. 38.

7. Duriez, *Les Apocryphes*, p. 34, thinks that the identification of Pilate with the Jews, found elsewhere in medieval drama, is a result of the use of the Apocryphal *Gesta Pilati* as a source. Here Pilate shows much knowledge of Jewish customs and history.



the tragedy of the cross. Except for the *Buffeting* (Play XXI), Pilate appears in every play, and is rarely out of the action for long. Even in the *Buffeting*, there is an important reference to Pilate.

How far Towneley goes in centering the action on Pilate is best understood from the scenes found in other plays but omitted in Towneley. Some of these, such as the York scene of the bowing of the banners before Jesus, are apocryphal.<sup>8</sup> Their omission in Towneley might conceivably be explained as due to ignorance of the apocryphal sources. But the most conspicuous omissions from Towneley are of at least three scenes which have clear scriptural authority.

The most important of these is the trial before Herod. Although Matthew, Mark, and John contain no mention of a trial before Herod, Luke interrupts the trial before Pilate with one before Herod, to whom Pilate sends Jesus because he is a Galilean. York, Chester, Ludus Coventriae, the Cornish *Passion*, and numerous Continental passions include a trial before Herod. The gospel harmonies which lie behind the cycles stress the part of Herod and explain away the failure of the three evangelists to mention it, and the Towneley passion in lacking a Herod scene is decidedly unusual. In fact, there are some indications that at one stage of Towneley, there was a trial before Herod. The *Buffeting* ends with Jesus being taken to Pilate. Yet when the torturers bring Jesus before Pilate in the next play, the *Scourging*, one of them announces that he comes from Herod. It looks as though a whole play, containing a trial before Herod, has dropped out.<sup>9</sup> If so, there are ample indications that the dropping is not accidental or purposeless. One speech commonly given to Herod in the other cycles is assigned to Pilate in Towneley. In York, Chester, and Ludus Coventriae, Herod welcomes Jesus, treats him kindly, says he has heard of Jesus' powers, and asks to see a miracle.<sup>10</sup> In the Towneley *Scourging* it is Pilate who asks Jesus, "Of thy greatt warkes

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8. York XXXIII, 161-292. The fifteenth-century Continental plays abound in such apocryphal and legendary incidents. The scene, in *Arras* and *Ste. Geneviève*, of the blacksmith who refuses to forge the nails for the crucifixion and the long defense of Jesus by Nicodemus in *Alselder* are samples.

9. See below, pp. 61-62n.

10. York XXXI, 134-39; Chester, XVI, 173-84; Ludus Coventriae, *Passion Play II*, 397-412.

shew vs som skylle."<sup>11</sup> The reason for this apparent dropping of the Herod play may well be that Herod is a competitor of Pilate as a ranter and tyrant and his inclusion in the play makes for dispersion.

A somewhat different consideration probably accounts for the absence in Towneley of Pilate's wife and her dream. York, *Ludus Coventriae*, the Cornish *Passion*, and several Continental passions contain a scene in which the devil, foreseeing the end of his power if Christ is killed and opens hell, appears to Pilate's wife in a dream and moves her to warn her husband against condemning the man.<sup>12</sup> In York the dream is preceded by a domestic scene between Pilate and his wife. For good measure York also has a low-comedy quarrel between Pilate's wife and the beadle. These scenes have been justly praised as excellent comedy of manners with a high human appeal, but they do slow up the main action.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in none of the passions is any adequate use made of the dream. Generally Pilate's wife sends someone, a son or a messenger, to warn Pilate, and there the matter drops. Obviously, the action does not fit the Towneley conception of Pilate, and it is somewhat uncontributory wherever it occurs. Anything like the domestic scene between Pilate and his wife would be completely out of tone in Towneley, which presents a picture of unrelieved grimness.

Another scene present in all other English cycles and in most Continental plays is Peter's denial of Christ. The hanging of Judas, which seems to have been popular and is represented in the other extant cycles, may also have appeared in Towneley. The manuscript contains as the last play a fragment (Play XXXII) in a hand much later than the rest of the manuscript and without any internal evidence of being a play rather than a poem. It is possible that the *Hanging of Judas* was a real play and was presented in its proper place in the cycle, but the evidence is against it. The explanation of the lack of treatment for Peter's denial and the probable lack of Judas' repentance

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11. L. 190.

12. York XXX, 158-76; *Ludus Coventriae*, Passion Play I, 503-22; Cornish *Passion*, 11. 1907-55.

13. York XXX, 25-123.

and suicide is that they are side issues. There is no place where the incidents could be placed that would not interfere with the straight-line development of action which seems to be the deliberate plan of the Towneley group.

In every instance in which we have noted omissions in Towneley of scenes present in all or some of the other cycles, there is a sound dramatic reason. The minor omissions, such as the denial of Peter, are to be accounted for by the requirements of concentration and compression. Still other omissions, the dream of Pilate's wife, for instance, are of material which is inappropriate to the character of Pilate as he appears in Towneley.

Some of these omissions might be accounted for by accident, or by the fewness of the plays in Towneley, as compared with York, though this latter explanation does not hold true if the comparison is between Towneley and Chester or Ludus Coventriae. Moreover, Towneley gives a good bit more time to the passion than certain Continental plays, *Palatinus* and *Ste. Geneviève*, for instance, yet the former of these finds time for a Herod scene and the latter for both Herod and the dream of Pilate's wife. Finally, it is unlikely that Towneley only for economy should sacrifice the trial before Herod, present in every passion play I have seen, and still afford a whole play to the division of Jesus' garments, an incident dealt with in fewer than a hundred lines in York, Chester, and the longest Continental plays. Yet precisely this happens in the Towneley *Talents* (XXIV), and the reason is not far to seek: Pilate is the chief character in *Talents*.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the omissions all make a clear pattern. They all appear intended for one reason: to focus the action on Pilate, to build up his characterization. Our analysis rather strongly indicates that the Towneley was willing to abandon material which other cycles thought necessary to include, was even willing to ignore scripture, when such material interfered with the dramatic plan or was inconsistent with the Towneley characterization of Pilate.

There are, however, two interesting scriptural details, both some-

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14. *Talents* was apparently once in the York Cycle and subsequently dropped. See below, p. 64.



what inconsistent with the Towneley Pilate's character, which Towneley includes. One is Pilate's reply to the Jews who objected to the inscription placed on the cross, the other Joseph of Arimathea's begging the body of Jesus. Both of these incidents present problems in Towneley. The latter is not solved very successfully. The only device the playwright could think of, apparently, was the one still used by directors who have to make an incredible piece of business seem credible: play it fast. Joseph's request is reduced to the minimum essentials. Pilate welcomes Joseph in three lines, Joseph asks for the body in another three lines, and Pilate grants the request in still another three lines.<sup>15</sup>

However, the Towneley dramatist solved the difficulty presented by the inscription. The three torturers look at the inscription with great curiosity. One discovers that it is written in "Ebrew and latyn/ And grew." Another, who is the "best latyn wright" in the company, expounds it "ihesu of Nazareyn / he is kyng of Iues." He then goes to Pilate to protest the "fals tabyll" on which is "wryten noght bot fabyll." Scripture requires Pilate to reply "What I have written, I have written." The Towneley Pilate does so reply but he does it in a fashion completely in keeping with his character. First he scolds the torturer for presuming to question his wisdom; "Boys, I say, what mell ye you?" Then he says that it will stand as it is written. He manages to insinuate that there is some good reason for the form of the inscription, a reason knowable only to a man of his own craft and guile, and that the common folk better leave such matters alone. The torturers are satisfied. The comment of one characterizes Pilate perfectly:

Sen that he is man of law/ he must nedys haue his will;  
I trow he had not writen that saw/ without som propre skyll.<sup>16</sup>

This is a searching comment, especially when one remembers how unfriendly the Towneley Cycle is to lawyers, gentlemen, and persons of authority.

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15. This scene occurs in a verse form assigned by some scholars to an early stage in the development of the cycle. See below, p. 89.

16. XXIII, 558-59.

Though it is true that the Towneley Plays achieve their effect of concentration on Pilate mainly by omitting tangential material, two additions demand attention. One is slight and is easily explained by the evident purpose of Towneley to give Pilate the stage whenever possible. Of all the passion plays I have seen, only Towneley gives Pilate any part in the capture of Jesus. In York, the only other play in which Pilate plays any part in the conspiracy, it is Annas and Caiaphas who send out the soldiers to take Jesus.<sup>17</sup> In Towneley, Pilate is the one who commands the soldiers to take "that fature fals." He accompanies the detail of soldiers, inspecting them and exhorting them before they set out. Pilate apparently stands by as Judas kisses Jesus and the soldiers seize Him. The soldiers bring Him to Pilate, not to Annas and Caiaphas as in other plays of the capture, and Pilate takes his turn insulting Jesus. When Primus Miles suggests killing Jesus out of hand, Pilate squelches him, and orders Jesus taken to Annas and Caiaphas. It is clear that Pilate dominates the scene throughout.

The second addition found in Towneley is more considerable. It consists of a whole play, the *Talents*, which comes between the *Crucifixion* and the *Deliverance of Souls*, or harrowing of hell. The incident on which the play is based is the division of Jesus' garments among the soldiers, alluded to in York,<sup>18</sup> and rather fully represented in Chester.<sup>19</sup> In its simple form it is dramatized in the Towneley *Crucifixion*,<sup>20</sup> so that *Talents* is really a repetition of material already presented, one of the few inconsistencies in the Towneley passion group.

The apparent purpose in the development of the division of the garments into a whole play is again to give Pilate a chance to characterize himself more fully, and to make a contrast with the play which follows. Pilate opens the *Talents* with one of his usual ranting speeches,

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17. The Pilate of the *Cornish Passion* views Jesus' preaching with alarm and agrees to the suggestion that He be killed, but he does not formally participate in a conspiracy. See above, pp. 13-14.

18. XXXIV, 322-26.

19. For analogues to the *Talents*, see above, pp. 10-11.

20. Ll. 498-515.

half Latin and half English. After eight stanzas of boasting and threatening, he goes to bed.<sup>21</sup> One after another the three torturers enter, all in a hurry. They have run from Calvary with Jesus' clothing, which they ask Pilate to divide. The torturers are suspicious of one another and, with good cause, of Pilate. After Pilate is awakened, they present their cases. Pilate claims the clothes for himself, but they protest. He then makes a division, but when they start to cut up the seamless coat, he stops them and suggests drawing lots. One of the torturers has three dice. Pilate insists on getting in the game and throws a thirteen on the first cast. When one torturer throws eight and another seven, it looks as though he will win, but the third comes up with fifteen. Pilate tries to disqualify the third torturer because he blew on the dice. When the others say he has won fairly, Pilate asks the coat as a gift and, on being refused, threatens the torturer, who finds it the better policy to yield to his superior.

Unless the *Talents* is to be regarded, as some regard the *Second Shepherds' Play*, as pure high spirits, it can have little purpose except to add the last and finishing touches to the character of Pilate. If that is its purpose, no one can doubt its success, for the Procurator of Judea here sketched is a crafty, unscrupulous fellow, not above using his power to browbeat a common soldier out of his winnings in a game of chance.<sup>22</sup> The scene also serves another dramatic function. It is preceded by the death on the cross and followed by the harrowing of hell, in both of which Christ is the dominating figure. Thus, a play about Pilate sandwiched between provides a contrast between the love, mercy, and all-embracing goodness of Jesus and the selfishness, pettiness, and tyranny of Pilate.

Our analysis of the structure of the Towneley passion group and the comparison of the Towneley treatment with that in other cycles indicate that Towneley is deliberately constructed to put maximum emphasis on Pilate, to make him the principal among the characters

21. A similar scene of Pilate's going to sleep occurs in York XXX, *Dream of Pilate's Wife*, and Beverley had a play of "Slepinge Pilate" (Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, II, 314), which likewise came before the play of the judgment before Pilate.

22. The seamless coat is, of course, of great value. One of the torturers says that it protects its wearer from loss, *Talents*, ll. 105-12. See above, pp. 10-11.



who persecute Jesus. Besides dramatic structure, one other method is available to the dramatist who wants to create a strong character: what the character himself does and says and what others do and say about him. Does an analysis of the speeches and actions of Pilate show the same intention that we have observed in the structure of the plays?

As we have seen, the characterization of Pilate presented great problems to medieval dramatists. Few escaped inconsistency. Even if any of the numerous attempts to portray a good Pilate had entirely avoided inconsistency, it is dubious if they would have produced a convincing and dramatically realized character. Analysis of the York characterization highlights the problems involved in creating a good Pilate and provides at least one possible reason why Towneley preferred to follow the opposite line.

The York Pilate, like all English Pilates, is a ranter, opening several plays with bombastic and threatening speeches. The York Pilate's actions in the plays are not entirely in keeping with the threatening utterances with which he opens them. He is constantly counselling moderation and calmness. He reiterates his desire to save Jesus if he can. In the scene with his wife before he goes to bed, he is represented as a mild and loving husband. Throughout the trial, which in York runs through three plays, he seeks every loophole to save Jesus, by suggesting that the Jews try him according to their law, by sending him to Herod, by offering to free Jesus on the feast day, by scourging Jesus in hope that the Jews will be satisfied. His great weakness is fear for his power. "And if so be, þat borde to bayll will hym bryng," he says when Caiaphas charges Jesus with calling himself king of the Jews.<sup>23</sup> At intervals through four plays, the Jews accuse Jesus of treason to the Emperor, and every time Pilate rises to the bait. It is finally the same charge, which he has already heard more than once and has every reason to disbelieve as he disbelieves all the other charges, that prevails on Pilate to have Jesus scourged and then crucified.

Aside from the quantity of extraneous material introduced into the

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23. York XXVI, 117.

York Plays,<sup>24</sup> the characterization of Pilate is relatively sound. There are, however, certain inconsistencies and difficulties that would deny its ever achieving the vigor and clarity of the Towneley portrayal. Pilate's vacillations are not wholly credible, at least in any presentation available to medieval dramaturgy. It is hard to reconcile the evident sincerity of Pilate's purpose to save Jesus with his tolerance of the brutality of the soldiers, who insult Jesus and cuff him about mercilessly. The York Pilate appears out of tone with the hatred and cruelty of the passion.

Then, too, York seems not to have been satisfied with the naïveté and sincerity with which it endows Pilate. On two occasions there are strong suggestions of the cynical selfishness of the Towneley Pilate. One comes in the brief scene of the division of the garments. To the suggestion that the garments be divided among the soldiers, 3 Miles assents but adds

3aa, and sir Pilate medill hym  
Youre parte woll be but small.<sup>25</sup>

Amplification of this side of Pilate's character appears in York XXXII, *Second Accusation before Pilate*. After Judas has repented, thrown down the thirty pieces of silver, and gone out to hang himself, Caia-phas, Annas, and Pilate debate what to do with the money. Since blood money cannot go into the treasury, Pilate suggests buying a potter's field with it. A squire enters who has a field which he is willing to lease but not to sell. Pilate assents to the terms and asks to inspect the deed. The squire innocently hands it over. Once Pilate has it in his hand, the property is his. The squire realizes that he has been tricked and goes out cursing Pilate and the company. Pilate bids his knights watch the squire. This is the crafty, double-dealing Pilate of Towneley, and that York inserts this scene, unique and wholly invented, so far as I can discover, makes one suspect that one of the York authors was not wholly satisfied with the characterization found elsewhere in the cycle.

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24. Possibly induced by the necessity of providing new plays as the number of guilds grew larger, also by a natural desire to embellish and adorn.

25. York XXXIV, 327-28.

Perhaps the best comparison of the York and Towneley Pilates is afforded by the circumstances that both end at the same place. The last appearance of Pilate in most dramatic treatments is the resurrection play. Because Towneley apparently borrowed the *Resurrection* from York, the treatment of Pilate in both cycles terminates in the same play.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting then to note that the Towneley characterization in the previous plays is more consistent with the Pilate of the common *Resurrection* than is that of York. In the common *Resurrection*, Pilate silences the centurion who suggests that the marvels attending the death of Jesus prove his innocence. He rails at the knights who bring him the news of the resurrection and bribes them to say that ten thousand well-armed men took the body.

The Pilate of the common *Resurrection* is considerably closer to the Towneley Pilate than to the York. In the plays preceding, the Towneley Pilate is a remarkable consistent character. The ranting speeches which tradition prescribed become him well. It is his nature to threaten and bluster. Like other tyrants in the cycles, Pharaoh and Herod, he is jealous of his power, forever watchful lest some upstart — some Moses or new-born king — threaten it. He is no stranger to such political methods as bribery. Thinking first of his own interests, railing at the soldiers who have put him in a compromising position, trying bribery as the way out — these actions fit the character of the Towneley Pilate.

They do not quite fit the York Pilate. Except for the scene with the squire, there is no suspicion that the York Pilate is capable of bribery. One rather feels that so vacillating a character would have changed his mind once again and been convinced by the marvels that Jesus was innocent. Perhaps he would have changed back again under pressure of the Jews. The common *Resurrection* obviously was not written to fit the York Pilate.

To say that the Towneley Pilate is consistent is not, however, to say that he is simple. He is an exceedingly complex character. There are contradictions and subtleties in his make-up, but all are rendered dramatically plausible. For instance, there is the jealousy of power,

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26. See below, pp. 67–68.



probably springing from an inner uncertainty, which contrasts strangely with the arrogance and bluster. Several times a subordinate mildly questions Pilate's course of action, and always Pilate explodes into vituperation. One example is the protest of the torturers to the inscription above the cross. They are told, in no uncertain terms, to mind their own business.<sup>27</sup> When Consultus tells Pilate that Jesus is dead, he too gets a sharp answer. "ffare and softly, sir," Pilate tells him:

and say not to far;  
Sett the with sorow, then semys thou the les,  
And of the law that thou leggy's be wytty and war,  
lest I greue the greatly with dyntys expres;  
ffals fatur, in fayth I shall slay the!  
Thy reson vnrad I red the redres,  
Or els of this maters loke thou nomore mell the.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, Pilate is one of those people who won't listen to anyone. When Consultus protests and defends the worth of his advice, Pilate asks him if he has finished. If so, says Pilate, cursing him, let me tell you something. You don't know anything about how great men run their affairs:

ye knaw not the comon cowrs that longys to a kyng.<sup>29</sup>

This fear that someone will get to know too much about his business, this chronic unwillingness to trust anything to subordinates, even such a simple matter as the taking of Jesus, is characteristic of the Towneley Pilate. He is an insecure man who has, moreover, a bad conscience. His ways are devious and the less others know of them the better. In his first speech he admits his love of the scoundrels who live in the dark of the law. His itemization is classic in its thoroughness:

Bot all fals indytars,  
Quest mangers and Iurers,  
And all this fals out rydars,  
Ar welcome to my sight.<sup>30</sup>

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27. XXIII, 546-57.

28. Note how skillfully the effect of rising anger is suggested.

29. XXIV, 202-25.

30. XX, 24-27.

He returns to the same refrain in almost identical words in a later speech.<sup>31</sup>

The Towneley Cycle uses the conventional bragging speeches of Pilate to characterize him in a manner unique in the craft plays. Instead of merely threatening and boasting as does the York Pilate, the Towneley Pilate describes his crookedness. He is

full of sotelty,  
ffalshed, gyll, and trechery.<sup>32</sup>

Especially is he adept at using his position to his own advantage:

My self if I it say / as men of cowrte now can;  
Supporte a man to day / to-morne agans hym than  
On both parties thus I play / and fenys me to ordan  
The right.<sup>33</sup>

In a later play he is more explicit. He plays both ends against the middle, inclining now to the right side of a case, now to the wrong, whichever is more profitable:

ffor like as on both sydys the Iren the hamer makith playn,  
So do I, that the law has here in my kepyng;  
The right side to socoure, certys, I am full bayne  
If I may get therby a vantage or wynyng;  
Then to the fals parte I turne me agayn,  
ffor I se more Vayll will to me be risyng.<sup>34</sup>

It is not from Pilate alone that we know of his venality. In the scene immediately preceding the speech just quoted, Caiaphas alludes to it. After recommending that Jesus be sent to Pilate, he is troubled with the thought that Pilate may "for mede/ let ihesus go," and the torturers, though they have to appeal to Pilate in the division of the clothes, also are on their guard:

Bot to sir pilate prynce I red that we go hy,  
And present hym the playnt how that we ar stad;

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31. XXII, 22-26.

32. XXII, 10-11.

33. XX, 20-27.

34. XXII, 14-19.

Bot this gowne that is here, I say you for-thy,  
By myghty mahowne I wold not he had.<sup>35</sup>

So says the second torturer, and the first torturer agrees: "Bot syrs, bi my lewte, he gettys not this gowne."<sup>36</sup>

All this iteration of Pilate's shiftiness both from his own mouth and from others' is not without its purpose. It is to explain the trial of Jesus. Here was the major artistic problem presented by the Towneley Pilate. For dramatic effectiveness and for a heightened tragic conflict, it was necessary for him to be the villain, to personify all the evil opposed to Jesus. By omission and by invention, the action of the passion group centers on Pilate as the antagonist. But there were certain inescapable actions which Pilate must perform and which were inconsistent with his character. Pilate must say that he finds no cause to condemn Jesus, he must wash his hands of Jesus' blood, he must yield only after intense pressure. Such actions would hardly be credible in a Pilate who has all along formed the spearhead of the plot against Jesus.

The Towneley solution is at once simple and dramatically sound. Pilate announces in his soliloquy at the beginning of the *Scourging* that he intends to appear a friend of Christ but notwithstanding to crucify him:

I shall fownde to be his freynd vtward, in certayn,  
And shew hym fare cowntenance and wordys of vanyte;  
Bot or this day at nyght on crosse shall he be slayn. . . .<sup>37</sup>

The preparation in the previous play is sufficient to render this explanation wholly satisfactory.

The conduct of the trial bears out Pilate's design. It is a mockery. Pilate obviously makes only a pretense of questioning Jesus, who speaks exactly two lines.<sup>38</sup> He offers to release Jesus, but when the first

35. XXIV, 161-64.

36. *Ibid.*, l. 167.

37. XXII, 31-33.

38. The spectacle of the silent Jesus forced to stand by while Pilate and the Jews played at trying him must have been moving. One wonders if the craft players who took the part of Jesus had the resources the role required. In most plays, Jesus has more dialogue than in Towneley.



torturer asks for Barabbas instead, Pilate instantly acquiesces and immediately orders Jesus scourged. The Towneley scourging is one of the most intensely cruel in medieval drama. Pilate stands by without comment. When the torturers have done their worst, Pilate adds his bit. Why doesn't Jesus ask mercy:

Thou man that suffurs all this yll / Why Wyll thou Vs no mercy cry?<sup>39</sup>

The question is obviously mocking. Indeed, Pilate appears almost to prompt the persecutors. Show us a miracle, he demands of Christ. Why don't you say something?

Pilate gives Jesus no real chance to defend himself, as he does in other plays, both English and Continental. In them, Pilate leads Jesus aside for a private questioning,<sup>40</sup> but not in Towneley. The torturers have all the lines in Towneley. When the mockery has gone far enough, Pilate washes his hands and condemns Jesus.

There can be little doubt that the trial before Pilate is only a bow to the proprieties.<sup>41</sup> In the haste of the proceedings, as compared not merely with York but even with Chester and *Ludus Coventriae*, in the omission of the interview between Pilate and Jesus, in Pilate's easy surrender of every position he takes in Jesus' defense—in all of these is evident the purpose to characterize Pilate as the real antagonist.

The total effect is, thus, that of tragedy. The theme of medieval scriptural drama as a whole is, as with much of the world's greatest literature, the conflict of good and evil. In the Towneley passion group each force is concentrated in a single character: the evil in Pilate and the good in Jesus. This analysis has shown how the concentration on Pilate has been achieved. He is made the dominating character among the persecutors. Rigid selection of material to exclude extraneous miraculous or comic incidents found in other passion plays is one method of attaining focus on the two principals, Pilate

39. XXII, 188.

40. Following John 18: 33-37.

41. The Towneley Pilate is the sort of person who demands the observance of legal forms as a tribute to his vanity as a judge. Cp. his attitude toward the suggestion, made by the soldiers at the capture, that Jesus be immediately condemned.

and Jesus. The other chief method is the careful compounding of Pilate's character from a variety of compatible evil traits.

Still another element needs attention, the uniform tone of the Towneley passion group. The execution is not all of a piece; some of the verse is inspired, some pedestrian, some mediocre. Still, a general sense of injustice and cruelty pervades the whole. A strong contrast is developed between the hatred of Caiaphas which overflows the proprieties demanded of a man of religion, the cynical selfishness of Pilate, the barbarity of the torturers, on the one side; and the tenderness of John, the poignancy of Mary's lament, and the all-embracing love of Jesus on the other. Not until Pilate and the forces he directs have done their worst and the limp body of the dead Christ is taken from the cross by Nicodemus and Joseph, is there any let up in the tension.

Then comes the first lightening — the play of the *Talents*, unique in the cycles. Even the placing of *Talents* is suggestive of tragedy, for it serves somewhat the same function as the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*. It follows a scene of great tension, and its humor is not light or boisterous, but grim and sardonic.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, the passion group, taken by itself, is a tragedy. The powers of evil have triumphed. An overwhelming weight of malice, jealousy, and ignorance have borne down the protagonist and at the end of the *Talents* Pilate and his cause stand supreme. The comedy, in the medieval sense, is to come in the next two plays which dramatize the harrowing of hell and the resurrection.

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42. Scott, *Notable Aspects of Satire in the Towneley Cycle*, regards the concluding speeches, in which the torturers, after losing, read sermons on the evils of gambling, as delicious satire. I am not so sure that they were so intended. Despite the fact that the speeches are in the Master's stanza, they look like routine moralizing to me.





### III. THE TOWNELEY PILATE AS SOCIAL SATIRE

No element in the Towneley characterization of Pilate gives it more vitality and immediacy than its social satire. Acquaintance with the large corpus of sermons, moral pieces, and satires which deal with the vices of the age shows conclusively that the Towneley Pilate is the embodiment of an evil which drew sharpest denunciations from moralists and satirists. As the very type of the corrupt judge and a general symbol of oppression and tyranny, Pilate has great contemporary significance. Neither the moralist nor the authors of the Towneley passion group were striking at straw men. The public records of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, though these are the products of the governing class and naturally biased, leave no doubt that almost every shire could show officials who might have served as models for the Towneley Pilate.

It is a remarkable fact that of the thirty-one plays in the Towneley Cycle, eight, over one-fourth, have as a central figure one of the four tyrants: Pharaoh, Caesar Augustus, Herod, and Pilate.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the problem of oppression of the poor and cruelty in high places receives attention in three other plays, the *First Shepherds' Play*, the *Second Shepherds' Play*, and the *Buffeting*. In the *Buffeting*, the vindictive hatred of Caiaphas, who has to be reminded that he is "a man of holy kyrk,"<sup>2</sup> is a vicious satire on the high clergy who, too often, as in the case of Hugh Spenser, Bishop of Norwich, were even more bloodthirsty than those to whom they were supposed to teach meekness. The outcry of the First Shepherd against "thyse gentlery men" by whom the peasantry

ar so hamyd,  
ffor-taxed and ramyd<sup>3</sup>

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1. Scott, *Notable Aspects*, pp. 78-79.

2. XXI, 208.

3. XIII, 16-18.

is perhaps the most poignant protest against oppression in medieval English literature.

The spirit of protest against social ills and of bitter satire on those who profit from the misery of common men runs through the whole Towneley Cycle. Nowhere do we feel it more strongly than in the characterization of Pilate. In one sense, the entire passion group, with its minute studies of cruelty, brutality, meanness, and corruption, is the complement of the two Shepherds' Plays. In the Shepherds' Plays, we see what life looks like from below; in the passion group, we see what it is like above. The contrast is not favorable to those who rule the world, to Caiaphas, Annas, Pilate, and their underlings.

There can be little question of the intent to satirize the great of the world in the portrait of Pilate. At his very first appearance, Pilate boasts of his power:

was neuer kyng with crowne  
More worthy.<sup>4</sup>

Partly, of course, this is merely the convention of the boasting Pilate, but the convention is vivified with specific social satire, for Pilate takes great pains to identify himself as a courtier, a great man, and the contemporary significance of this characterization is carefully underlined:

My self if I it say / as men of cowrte now can;  
Supporte a man to day / to-morn agans hym than,  
On both parties thus I play / And fenys me to ordan  
The right. . . .<sup>5</sup>

In many little touches, the arrogance and guile of Pilate are developed, as when, for instance, Pilate's counsellor tells a truth out of turn. "Ye know not the common cowrs that longys to a kyng,"<sup>6</sup> says Pilate, you don't understand that duplicity and deception are the way of a great man. Or again, when after the resurrection, the Centurion

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4. XX, 13-14.

5. *Ibid.*, ll. 20-23.

6. XXIV, 225.

insists on maintaining the truth of Christ's divinity, Pilate reminds him of his duty:

ye ar a greatt man of oure law,  
 And if we shuld any wytnes draw,  
 To vs excuse,  
 To mayntene vs euermore ye aw,  
 And noght refuse.<sup>7</sup>

The satirical intent of the passion group in Towneley is then to present an anatomy of oppression, not in all its forms, but in one. The plays of *Pharaoh* (VIII), *Caesar Augustus* (IX), and *Magnus Herodes* (XVI) have already given a sufficiently vivid expression of the nakedest form of oppression, the unscrupulous use of absolute power. The common people of England were doubtless familiar with this face of tyranny, but against it they had some redress, and it is probably true that "great men" of the fourteenth or fifteenth century in England did not commonly take what did not belong to them by brute force.

There was law in the land, and only by the manipulation of the law could the great enforce their will — or at least most of them did obtain legal sanction for their acts. The common people therefore generally saw the face of oppression masked by the dignity of the law. The corrupt justice of the assize, the bribed jurors, the learned men of law who could prove black white for a price, the powerful who used the machinery of the courts like a whip — these are the tyrants whom the poor and powerless hated and feared. When the peasants rose in rebellion in 1381, no one felt their wrath more heavily than those concerned with the law. Froissart speaks of the revolters as "always following their plan of destroying houses of lawyers or proctors on the right and left" of their route of march.<sup>8</sup> Oman, the historian of the Peasants' Revolt, writes that "of all classes obnoxious to the insurgents, the legal profession was the most hated." In London,

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7. XXVI, 93-97. "Mayntene" is here used, as commonly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in a pejorative sense. In all the extracts below it is to be understood in this sense.

8. II, lxxv (p. 284).



they assaulted the Temple, sacked the Inns of Court, destroyed charters, muniments, and records.<sup>9</sup>

It is then no accident that the Towneley Cycle, bent on making Pilate as odious as possible, should represent him as a man of the law. It is hardly possible that the emphasis on law in the passion group is fortuitous or unconscious. The idea of law is too often repeated and too heavily emphasized for that. Jesus' chief crime is that he will upset the law.<sup>10</sup> Pilate's appearance in the cycle opens and closes with references to the law. In his opening soliloquy, he complains that the "fature fals ihesus" if he lives a year will destroy "oure law."<sup>11</sup> Later he calls on Judas to fulfill his bargain

To this tratoure be take  
That wold dystroy oure lawe.<sup>12</sup>

In his soliloquy before the condemnation scene, Pilate explains that he means to crucify Jesus because

. . . no thyng in this world dos me more grefe  
Then for to here of Crist and of his new lawes. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Finally, when Pilate hears of the resurrection, his first thought is of the law:

Alas, then ar oure lawes forlorne  
ffor euermore.<sup>14</sup>

Pilate personifies the law as a tool of injustice and oppression, and the social import of the whole passion group is that it presents a picture of the common man, Jesus, in the grip of the law.

In so conceiving the character of Pilate, the Towneley Cycle is not entirely original. Of all the protests voiced by the preachers, the moralists, and the satirists, none exceeds in volume that against the

9. *The Great Revolt of 1381*, pp. 58-59.

10. Scott, p. 72.

11. XX, 37-38.

12. *Ibid.*, 576-77.

13. XXII, 40-41.

14. XXVI, 524-25.

law. Summarizing the treatment of the law in Latin sermon manuals, Owst writes that they give us the impression

that the lower orders of society are entirely at the mercy of a class of trained and educated specialists who take full advantage of their superior equipment in a highly technical field. . . . In the second place, we are impressed with the prevalence of the contemporary belief that he who has no money with him will never have the ear of justice. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Certainly the English preachers, orthodox and heterodox alike, rarely miss an opportunity to rail at those who have the law in their keeping. Wyclif tells us that men of law who should put down wrong really maintain it for fees and robes and thus "forbaren pore men fro here riȝt."<sup>16</sup> One of the three things that destroy the world is "false men of lawe" who make "doseyns to forsweren hem on þe book to gete hem self þank or wynnynge." They keep true men off juries, they protract proceedings so as to exhaust the means of poor suitors, they procure divorces by false witnesses.<sup>17</sup>

The fifteenth century compilation of sermons known as *Jacob's Well* lists under "couvetousness" not fewer than twelve kinds of abuse of the law. Among those who wrest the law to their damnation are false plaintiffs, false witnesses, false sizars, lawyers who maintain unjust causes, false pleaders, solicitors, secretaries, proctors, and judges who do "more wrong þan evynhed in iugement, for auantage."<sup>18</sup> Another collection of Middle English sermons speaks of rich "raueners" who prey on people like the lion in the bestiaries. "Som þei take with maistry [i.e. with force], som by plee and fals questes." There is no use complaining to another great man for "commonly þe gret holdeþ to-geþur."<sup>19</sup>

Satirists took up this complaint, and it is the burden of many acid passages in Gower and *Piers Plowman*. An oft-repeated charge of

15. *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 341-42.

16. *Works* (EETS), p. 234.

17. *Ibid.*, 182-84.

18. *Jacob's Well*, Pt. I, pp. 130-31.

19. *Middle English Sermons*, p. 238.

Gower is that he who comes empty-handed into court will not thrive, for justice does not act her part for the poor:

Set super omne modo sibi ve, qui pauper egendo  
 Quid petit in lege, dum nequit ipse dare!  
 Publica sunt ista nobis, quod lege moderna  
 Pauperis in causa ius negat acta sua.<sup>20</sup>

*Mum and the Sothsegger* repeats the same sentiment: it is common talk that a poor man who sues a rich one "wirscheth al in waste and wynneth but a lite."<sup>21</sup> In *Piers Plowman* the whole episode of the marriage of Mede is directed against corruption in the law. When Conscience protests against the marriage of Mede and Fals, the cause is taken to Westminster for judgment. There Favel distributes florins to the notaries and buys false witnesses.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, when Wrong is brought into court for extortion and oppression, Mede—who here stands for bribery—proves so powerful that even the plaintiff, Peace, who has been grievously wronged, is willing to drop the suit.<sup>23</sup> It is only fitting, then, that when the orders of men repent and come for pardon

Men of lawe lest pardoun hadde · that pleteden for mede,  
 For the sauter saueth hem nouȝte · such as taketh ȝiftes,  
 And namelich of innocentz · that none yuell ne kunneth. . . .<sup>24</sup>

Besides this general distrust of the law and all who serve it, fourteenth and fifteenth century writers voice quite distinct specific accusations. The two most common complaints are of corrupt judges and bribed jurors. Both the sermon literature and the satires have much to say about corrupt judges.<sup>25</sup> John Bromyard, the Dominican preacher of the late fourteenth century and author of perhaps the most celebrated of the sermon manuals, attributes to judges four vices: "Munera, amor, favor, et odium."<sup>26</sup> To Bromyard's four, many

20. *Vox Clamantis*, VI, iv, 279–82. Cf. *Mirour de l'home*, ll. 24185–87.

21. "M," ll. 1489–1616.

22. B, II, esp. 143–46.

23. B, IV, 67–103.

24. B, VII, 39–42.

25. Owst, pp. 338–49.

26. *Summa predicantium*, chapter IX, "Iudices," ff. 400v–402v.



authors add another: fear. An English moral treatise lists in the sixth branch of "challenging," a division of "couvetousness," "þes fals justises and juges, þat hongeth more touward þat o syde þan þat oþere for 3iftes, or for bihestes, or for biddynges, or for loue, or for hate, or for drede . . ."<sup>27</sup> More economically, Gower, in the *Mirour*, gives as corrupting elements, gifts, entreaties, love, and fear.<sup>28</sup> In the *Vox Clamantis* the list is further reduced to three: money, love, and fear.

Sunt tria precipue, quibus est turbacio legis  
Vnde sui iuris perdit vbique locum;  
Munus, amicia, timor. . .<sup>29</sup>

The bribed judge is a common figure in the satire and protest literature of the late fourteenth century. Gower, for instance, tells us that it is gold that weighs the scales of justice. If I give more money than you, right matters not a straw, for right without a gift is of no worth to judges:

Q'ore est justice en la balance  
Del orr, qui tant ad de vertu,  
Car si je donne plus que tu,  
Le droit ne te valt un festu;  
Car droit sanz doun n'est de vaillance  
As Jugges. . .<sup>30</sup>

*Piers Plowman* tells the same story. Couvetousness

boldeliche bar adown • with many a brizte noble  
Moche of the witte and wisdom • of Westmynster halle.  
He Iugged til a Iustice • and Iusted in his ere,  
And ouertilte al his treuthe. . .<sup>31</sup>

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27. *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, pp. 35-36. Cp. *Ayenbite of Inwit*, p. 40, "þe valse demeres þet ham zelue hongeþ more of one half þanne of anoþre be yeffes oþer be behotinges oþer uor loue oþer uor wreþe oþer uor drede." *Vices and Virtues* and *Ayenbite of Inwit*, as well as Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, derive from the same source, Friar Lorens' *Somme des vices et des vertues*.

28. Ll. 24625-27.

29. VI, iv, 265-68.

30. *Mirour*, ll. 24629-34.

31. B, XX, 131-34.

Hoccleve concurs in these sentiments:

To god he doth displesaunce & offence;  
 ffor þei iustice wiche of duetee  
 He shulde do, cursidly sellith he,  
 ffor loue of mede him prouokith þer-to  
 And riztwysnesse no þing so to do.  
 To swich a iuge withdrawe þe hope  
 Of money, and he fro iustice flyttyþ.<sup>32</sup>

"Swich a iuge" is the Towneley Pilate. In the soliloquy before the *Scourging*, in which Pilate judges Christ, he identifies himself as the bribed judge:

ffor like as on both sydys the Iren the hamer makith playn,  
 So do I, that the law has here in my kepyng;  
 The right side to socoure, certys, I am full bayn,  
 If I may get therby a vantage or wynyng;  
 Then to the fals parte I turne me agayn,  
 ffor I se more Vayll will to me be risyng. . . .<sup>33</sup>

Nor is Pilate the only witness against himself. In the play immediately preceding, Caiaphas has expressed his fear that Pilate may let Jesus go:

ffor I am euer in drede / wandreth, and wo,  
 lest pylate for mede / let ihesus go . . .  
 Bot gyftys marres many man.  
 Bot he deme the sothe than,  
 The dwill haue his bonys!<sup>34</sup>

In conceiving Pilate as the familiar unjust judge, the Towneley Cycle has some precedent in the sermon literature. "The figure of Pilate," writes Owst, "we recognize next as our old friend of the Civil Courts, the unjust Judge."<sup>35</sup> Bishop Brunton, denouncing corruption, probably in the 1370's, compares English justice with the "Justice of the Jews at the time of Christ's passion."<sup>36</sup> True, the sermons incline to

32. *Regiment of Princes*, ll. 2698-2704.

33. XXII, 14-19.

34. XXI, 434-41.

35. Pp. 495-96. "Caiaphas and Annas stand for the evil Ecclesiastical Lawyer. . . ."

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-40.

view the source of Pilate's injustice as fear rather than money, but the identification of Pilate with the unjust judge is there.

Thus a sermon writer fixes the blame:

By unjoste dred, on word acombers the jugges, whan an erthly man is more drad than God, othur the right. Such a jugge was Pilate, demyng Crist to dethe, dredynge, ziff that he had saved hym, that the Jewes wold have peched hym to the Emperour.<sup>37</sup>

Though, in Towneley, Pilate's injustice does not seem to spring from fear (as it does in most of the passion plays) the general attitude toward Pilate of the sermon writers is perhaps responsible for these lines:

I am full of sotelty,  
ffalshed, gyll, and trechery;  
Therfor am I namyd by clergy  
As mali actoris.<sup>38</sup>

Very probably the clergy who named Pilate as "mali actoris" were the preachers.

Not satisfied with representing Pilate as a corrupt judge, the Towneley cycle brings almost the whole body of those who pervert the law into the scope of its satire. In his opening soliloquy, Pilate identifies himself with those who bring false actions and with bribed jurors:

Bot all fals indytars,  
Quest mangers and Iurers  
And all thise fals out rydars  
Ar welcom to my sight.<sup>39</sup>

37. Quoted in Owst, p. 344. Cp. Bromyard, *Summa predicantium*, chapter IX, "Iudices," f. 397<sup>v</sup>: "Quandoque uero impeditur timore, sicut ignis, qui magnorum timore falsa committunt iuramenta, innocentia, innocentesque condemnant, tam duodena, quam iudex, nocentesque liberat, hi de ordine sunt Pilati, qui timore Caesaris, cuius amicitiam timuit amittere, uel indignationem incurrere, quando clamabant, si hunc dimittis, non es amicus Caesaris, contra conscientiam sine sufficienti inuestigatione, Christum condemnauit."

38. XXII, 10-13. Cf. Owst, p. 496.

39. XX, 24-27.



This same sentiment is repeated, with a little variation, in a later speech:

All fals endytars  
Quest-gangars and Iurars  
And thise out-rydars  
Ar welcom to me.<sup>40</sup>

With the exception of the outriders, all the people Pilate welcomes are familiar to us in the satires on the law so prevalent in the latter part of the fourteenth century.

The "questmonger" seems almost to be a symbol of legal corruption in the period. There is some doubt about the exact meaning of the word. The Oxford Dictionary glosses it conjecturally as "persons who made it their business and profit to give information and cause judicial enquiries to be made against others, so as to get a share of the fines." Doubtless the word sometimes has that specific meaning, but it seems safer to give it a more generalized meaning of "corrupt and bribed juror."<sup>41</sup>

Whatever the precise meaning of the word, the questmonger was an odious figure, to whom preachers and moralists often pay their respects. "þise false questemongeres," says one preacher, "for a litill money or els for a good dyner will saue a theffe and dampne a trewe man."<sup>42</sup> Bromyard tells a story of a juror who, when the jury was asked if it had agreed on a verdict, answered, "No! because each of my fellow jurymen has received forty shillings, and I have only received twenty."<sup>43</sup> It seems likely that Bromyard exaggerates the price of perjury, for Wyclif states that "iurrouris in questis wolen forsweren hem wittingly for here dyner & a noble."<sup>44</sup> Chaucer's Parson warns his listeners, "Ware yow questemongeres and notaries. Certes for fals

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40. XXII, 23-26.

41. See "Middle English *Questmonger*," *Mediaeval Studies*, X (1948), 200-204.

42. *Middle English Sermons*, p. 174.

43. "Sicut patet in illis, a quibus iudex (ut moris est) quaesivit, si essent in uno concordati, quorum unus respondit non, qui quilibet de socijs meis accepit quadraginta solidos, & ego non recepi nisi viginti, chorda illa ideo discordabat, quia non fuit ita intensa tacta, sicut aliae," *Summa predicantium*, chapter IX, "Iudices," f. 397.

44. *Works* (EETS), p. 183. A "noble" is generally reckoned as 6/8.

witnessyng was Susana in ful greet sorwe and peyne and many mo."<sup>45</sup>

*Piers Plowman* and Gower also have something to say about false jurors. When Conscience calls all to dig a moat about Holy Church, everyone comes except common women, false men, flatterers, usurers, thieves and

Lyerres and questmongeres · that were forsworen ofte  
Wytynge and willefully · with the false helden,  
And for syluer were forswore · sothely thei wist it.<sup>46</sup>

Gower denounces bribed juries in both his satirical works. In *Vox Clamantis* he says that the lawyers take the fleece, and the jurors the hide, so that the sheep is destitute:

Causidici lanam rapiunt, isti quoque pellem  
Tollunt, sic inopi nil ramanebit oui.<sup>47</sup>

In the *Mirour*, Gower goes into detail. False jurors, he says, have captains, called "*traiciers*" (pullers), who manage the rest. If anyone needs perjured witnesses or wants to bribe a jury, he speaks to these *traiciers*, who then assemble buyable jurors and instruct them. The *traiciers* even train young and inexperienced jurors in the mysteries of the trade:

De ces jurours fals et atteintz  
Encore y ad des capiteins,  
Traiciers ont noun, c'est assavoir  
Q'ils treront, mais nounpas des meins,  
Ainz du malice dont sont pleins,  
La remenant a leur voloir. . . .

. . . . .

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45. *Parson's Tale*, l. 797. The bribed juror was then even more a menace to justice than he is now, for in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the jury still kept its original function. It was a group of men supposedly familiar with the principals in the case and with the background of the action, so that it combined the functions of judging with those of a witness.

46. B, XIX, 367-69. In C Version, XXII, 372, reads "a sisour and a somenour" instead of "Lyerres and questmongeres."

47. VI, vi, 439-40.

A les assisses et jurées  
 Qui voet avoir les perjurez  
 Parler covient a ces Traiciers;  
 Car a lour part ont aroutez  
 Tous les fals jurours redoubtez,  
 Qui se vendont pour les derniers. . . .  
 Est affaité du veneour  
 De courre au serf ou a goupil,  
 Tout autre cy ly fals traïçour  
 Les jofnes gens qui sont questour  
 Affaite et entre a son peril:  
 Qant nay dirra, dirront nenil,  
 Qant dist oïl, si dirront il. . . .<sup>48</sup>

The pseudo-Chaucerian *Tale of Gamelyn* hinges on legal corruption. Gamelyn is a younger brother, cheated of his inheritance by an older brother. When the oldest brother, Sir Ote, tries to rescue Gamelyn from the toils of a corrupt sheriff and judge, Sir Ote himself nearly loses his life:

The false knight his brother · forȝat he nat that,  
 To huyre the men on his quest · to hangen his brother.<sup>49</sup>

In the end, Gamelyn takes the law in his own hands, raises a band of followers, frees Sir Ote, and slays the false sheriff, the bribed judge, and the subverted jurors. Considering the popular attitude towards the law, this must have been an eminently satisfying conclusion.

A complete understanding of the effect of the Towneley Pilate on a late fourteenth or early fifteenth century audience is not, however, to be gained by limiting oneself to the preachers and the moralists. Satire, more perhaps than any other sort of writing, derives its validity from its faithfulness to experience. In seeking to make Pilate thoroughly odious, the Towneley Cycle has portrayed him as a corrupt judge and has deftly transferred to him the popular ill will towards rapacious men of the law, and perjured questmongers. The degree to which this characterization can be regarded as an artistic triumph depends on the

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48. Ll. 25033-64.

49. Ll. 800-01.



collective experience of the audience. If the common man was painfully aware of legal corruption, saw it all about him and himself suffered from it or knew men who had suffered from it, then the merest suggestion that Pilate belonged to the hated class was sufficient to initiate a series of strong emotions.

In so far as official records can attest anything, they do attest the prevalence of legal corruption. Such incidents as the mobbing of the questmonger Robert Legget, in the Peasants Revolt of 1381, bear witness to the popular detestation of judicial malpractice.<sup>50</sup> Statutes, royal commissions, and parliamentary petitions throughout the reigns of Edward III, Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI furnish ample proof of widespread corruption.<sup>51</sup>

Several statutes in the reign of Edward III deal specifically with bribed jurors and judges. A statute of Edward III (1331) provides that any juror in assizes, juries, or inquests convicted of accepting bribes of one party or the other shall be attainted therefor and shall not thereafter serve on any jury. He may be sent to prison at the king's will.<sup>52</sup> Fifteen years later, justices are required to take an oath that they have not received "privily nor apertly" any gold, silver, or thing of value. They are required further not to take any fee or robes from any man except the king so long as they are justices.<sup>53</sup> Both corrupt jurors and "embracers," that is, those who procure inquests for gain (probably the "false indyters" of Pilate's speech) are fined ten times the amount they receive or imprisoned for a year.<sup>54</sup>

Attempts to enforce these statutes are evident from records of numerous commissions to inquire into judicial corruption throughout the reign of Edward III and into that of Richard II. A few illustrations must suffice. In 1361 a commission is appointed to inquire into a jury

50. Oman, p. 59; Petit du Taillis in Réville, p. lxxvii.

51. ". . . The parliament rolls show that the honesty of provincial courts was declining, that the law itself was coming to be a weapon in the hands of the unscrupulous, and that open violence was on the increase," Jolliffe, *Constitutional History of Medieval England*, p. 410.

52. *Statutes of the Realm*, I, 267.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 305. Another statute to this effect was enacted in 8 Richard II (1384), *ibid.*, II, 37, but suspended the following year, *ibid.*, II, 38.

54. *Ibid.*, I, 385.

in Warwickshire who took bribes, apparently from both sides.<sup>55</sup> A few years later, in 1364, a commission of oyer and terminer is authorized to investigate Leicester jurors accused of the same offense.<sup>56</sup> In 5 Richard II (1381) there is an order not to proceed to judgment in the case of the King versus the Abbot of St. Mary, York, and the Prior of Wetherdale, because the King has learned that the Abbot and the Prior have suborned the inquisitors.<sup>57</sup> In 1391, the Abbot of St. Osith in Essex petitions the King to redress him for various extortions inflicted by John Rokell. The Abbot can get no redress by common law because Rokell controls the ministers, officers, bailiffs, and jurors of the country, who are all retainers, tenants, or relatives of Rokell.<sup>58</sup>

Hardly a parliament in the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI fails to produce one or more complaints similar to the Abbot of St. Osith's. In 1382 the commons ask that no justice of law be a justice of assize, deliverance, or inquest in the country from which he comes, because of his "affinity"<sup>59</sup> with the lords and great men of the place and because of "divers gifts," which make it impossible for the commons to secure justice.<sup>60</sup> Two years later, a statute to this effect is enacted.<sup>61</sup> In 1399 the first parliament of Henry IV petitions that in case of dowry, cosenage, redisseisen, waste, and the like — that is, cases involving property — a writ of attainr may be issued against perjured jurors.<sup>62</sup>

In 1414, the second year of Henry V's reign, a parliamentary petition asserts that various men have been deprived of their natural rights and disinherited by false jurors, who have received gold and silver. Parliament asks that jurors be put on oath that they have not received and will not receive anything for their verdicts and that if they are found

55. *Patent Rolls, Edward III, 1358-61*, pp. 582, 585.

56. *Ibid.*, 1364-67, pp. 63-64.

57. *Close Rolls, Richard II, 1381-85*, p. 15.

58. *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, III, 287b-88a (15 Richard II).

59. Concerning "affinity" see Joliffe, pp. 428-30.

60. *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, III, pp. 139ab (6 Richard II).

61. *Statutes of the Realm*, II, 36: 8 Richard II (1384). Confirmed in 13 Henry IV (1411), *Statutes*, II, 166-67.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 444b (1 Henry IV).

perjured they be fined and imprisoned.<sup>63</sup> A petition in 1433, under Henry VI, speaks of "le usuell perjurie des Jurrours enpanalez en enquestes . . . la quell perjurie habunde & encrece de jour en autre plus que soloit, pur les graundez dones que tieulx Jurrours preignant de les parties enplees suez en lest ditz courtes."<sup>64</sup> And so the tale goes.

One could collect from almost every year between 1350 and 1450 evidence in official records of corruption of judges, juries, and officials. One must remember, too, that the official records all come from the upper classes. We do not hear the side of the serf and the small free man. Only when someone rich and powerful enough to make his voice heard in parliament, to gain the king's ear, or to seek redress at law interested himself in a case do we have an official record of it. How familiar then must legal corruption have been to the common people, to Gyb and Gill and Daw and John Horne, who gathered from the West Riding countryside to see the Towneley Plays!

In utilizing the popular detestation of bribed judges and perjured jurors Towneley has secured one of the greatest triumphs in medieval dramaturgy. The dramatic plan of the passion group in Towneley called for a villainous Pilate. The identification of Pilate with an odious class is a stroke of genius. Like most manifestations of literary genius, it is supremely simple. Suggestions that Pilate was a corrupt judge abound; all the materials for creating a superbly odious character were present. Only a little arrangement, a proper emphasis, and a purposeful selection of details was needed. Some unknown genius, who worked deliberately according to a plan, selected, arranged, and emphasized. The result is perhaps the first great tragic villain in the modern theatre.

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63. *Ibid.*, IV, 112a.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 448b (11 Henry VI). See also *Statutes of the Realm*, II, 280.





#### IV. TEXTUAL PROBLEMS IN THE TOWNELEY PASSION AND RESURRECTION GROUP

The great puzzle, not merely in the passion and resurrection group but in the Towneley Cycle as a whole, is that such artistic achievements occur in the most pieced-together of the English cycles. That Towneley is a patchwork cycle, possibly assembled from various places, certainly including several plays from the York Cycle, and certainly revised and rewritten several times is abundantly clear from the scholarship of the last half century.

Largely devoted to textual problems and especially concerned with establishing the canon of the Wakefield Master, this body of scholarship presents conclusions that seem to contradict categorically the results of our study. The structure of the passion group, the consistency of characterization, the numerous anticipations and motivations — all point to a single author working according to a definite plan. Single authorship, in fact any kind of unity, is precisely what the textual scholarship, at least by implication, denies.

It is, therefore, imperative that this study present some hypothesis to explain this apparent contradiction. The purpose of this chapter is to review and analyze the textual scholarship, then to test the findings of this textual scholarship by the evidence of dramatic structure and artistic achievement, and finally to suggest a hypothesis reconciling the undoubted unity of dramatic effect with the established diversity of authorship.

Textual criticism of the Towneley Cycle begins with the discovery by Lucy Toulmin Smith, the editor of the York Cycle, that five of the Towneley plays are, except for minor interpolations, occasional editing, and inconsequent verbal variations, identical with corresponding plays in the York Cycle. Of these identical plays, only one, the *Resurrection* (Towneley XXVI) is a Pilate play. Following this discovery,

students have tried to work out hypotheses to account for both the presence of York Plays in Towneley and the different strata within that part of Towneley not identical with York. Scholars noted the presence of several metrical forms, of various stanzas, couplets, quatrains, and a variety of simple and complicated strophic forms. These metrical and stanzaic forms have formed the chief criterion for the division of the cycle into strata. Sometimes other considerations have entered into the division, artistic effect, for instance, but more often metrical and stanzaic patterns have been the only principle of division.

The first critic<sup>1</sup> to attempt dividing Towneley into strata was Davidson, who finds that the whole cycle is a "collection of plays drawn from various sources" and compiled by a poet of little ability who wrote in couplets and occasionally in quatrains.<sup>2</sup> In the *Conspiracy* (XX), the only one of the passion group which he analyzed in full, he saw six different strata, one of which he recognized as the contribution of a comic genius called by subsequent scholars "The Wakefield Master," who was also the author of the two *Shepherds' Plays*. The Master wrote a characteristic nine-line stanza composed of a four-line frons ( $\begin{smallmatrix} aaaa \\ bbbb \end{smallmatrix}$ ), a bob of usually one foot, often anapestic, (c), three three-foot lines (ddd), and another bob, generally of two feet (c). Other strata recognized by Davidson are one he called "York Parent-cycle," one by the compiler, and three others, to which he attached no names.<sup>3</sup> Pilate's lines occur in all but one of these strata.

Pollard, who wrote the introduction to the Early English Text Society edition of the Towneley Plays, distinguished three stages. The first was characterized by a simple religious tone and embraced those plays or parts of plays written principally in the six-line *rime couée* ( $a^4a^4a^4b^3a^4b^3$ ). This stage of the cycle he assigned to an early period, perhaps about mid-fourteenth century, since the *rime couée* was already somewhat out of fashion in Chaucer's day. The second stage

1. Hohlfeld, "Die altenglischen Kollektivmysterien," *Anglia* XI (1888), 219-310, divided the Towneley cycle into eight groups of plays. He did not divide individual plays into strata, nor is his division of the cycle into groups of plays sufficiently detailed or exact to be of great use in the analysis of a particular character.

2. "Studies in the English Mystery Plays," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, IX (1892), 253.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 277-81.



was, according to Pollard, "the introduction by some playwright, who brought the knowledge of them from elsewhere, of at least five — possibly seven or eight — of the plays which were acted at York, and the composition of some others in the same style." The third stage was that of the Wakefield Master. Pollard, however, thought that the Master's work probably extended to certain plays and parts of plays not in the nine-line stanza. To complete the picture, Pollard allowed that "subsequent editors may have tinkered here and there . . . and much allowance must be made for continual corruption by actors."<sup>4</sup>

Gayley, another early student of the Towneley Plays, followed, in general, Pollard's description of the strata, except that he was inclined to emphasize the connection between the Master and what he called the "York School of Humor and Realism" and to widen the contributions of the Master somewhat beyond Pollard's boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

Slightly later, Cady further refined the distribution of the cycle into strata. For the passion group, he distinguished an original layer, in *rime couée*, an editing of this in couplets, another editing in quatrains, extensive borrowings from York (especially in the thirteen-line stanza characteristic of several plays in York), and a still further editing and interpolation by the Master.<sup>6</sup> This division met opposition from Grace Frank, who argued that the cycles were not subject to editing and revising as a whole, but only by individual plays, in accordance with the needs and wishes of the particular craft or group of crafts that produced them.<sup>7</sup>

The next important attempt to explain the textual constitution of Towneley was that of Marie C. Lyle, who saw the York and Towneley Cycles as divergent developments of a single parent-cycle. Miss Lyle then split up the Towneley Cycle into six groups of plays. The first consists of the five plays "which still remain identical in the two cycles." Of the five, the *Resurrection* (XXVI) is the only one in which Pilate appears. In the second group are plays "which still retain, in spite of later revision on the part of either York or Towneley, a simi-

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4. *Towneley Plays*, pp. xxvii–xxviii.

5. *Plays of Our Forefathers*, pp. 133, 184–89.

6. "The Passion Group in Towneley," *MP*, X (1913), 587–600.

7. "Revisions in the English Miracle Plays," *MP*, XV (1917), 565–72.

larity in underlying structure, together with isolated passages showing parallel phraseology occasionally retaining even common rhyme words." Into this second group, Miss Lyle puts the *Conspiracy* (XX), which she divides into three parts, and the *Crucifixion* (XXIII). The third group, which also shows similarity in structure and phraseology, but without common rime words, contains no plays in which Pilate appears, but does contain the *Buffeting* (XXI), which has an important characterizing reference to Pilate. In the fourth group, which shows only similarity of structure, falls the *Scourging* (XXII). The fifth group contains only one play, the fragmentary *Purification* (Towneley XVII). The sixth group, composed of plays in but one of the cycles with no corresponding play in the other, includes the *Talents* (Towneley XXIV), an important Pilate play.<sup>8</sup>

Succeeding scholarship has centered largely around attacks and defenses of Miss Lyle's theory of original identity and more exhaustive studies of the work of the Wakefield Master. Frances A. Foster<sup>9</sup> and Eleanor Grace Clark<sup>10</sup> attack the theory of the parent-cycle as based on too little evidence. Grace Frank accepts much of Lyle's work but prefers instead of supposing a "parent-cycle" "to speak of Towneley's borrowings from York . . . and to posit the original identity of individual plays in the cycle rather than the identity of the cycles themselves."<sup>11</sup>

The Pilate plays which Frank would apparently accept as borrowed from York are, in addition to the identical *Resurrection*, the *Conspiracy* and the *Crucifixion*. She would apparently not accept the *Scourging*.

Of the several studies on the Wakefield Master, Millicent Carey touches the problem of the characterization of Pilate only in her dis-

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8. *The Original Identity of the York and Towneley Cycles*, esp. pp. 52-53. Lyle calls attention to the presence of a play in York, now dropped, which may have been identical with the *Talents* (p. 98), a suggestion developed by Frampton. See below, p. 64.

9. "Was Gilbert Pilkington Author of the *Secunda Pastorum*?" *PMLA*, XLIII (1928), 131-33.

10. "The York Plays and the *Gospel of Nichodemus*," *PMLA*, XLIII (1928), 153-61.

11. "On the Relation between the York and Towneley Plays," *PMLA*, XLIV (1929), 313-18. See also Lyle's reply to Foster and Clark, "The Original Identity of the York and Towneley Cycles — a Rejoinder," *PMLA*, XLIV (1929), 319-28.

cussion of the Wakefield stanza and the canon of the Master's work.<sup>12</sup> Of Mendal G. Frampton's articles, the one dealing with the *Talents* is of primary importance to our study, since it analyzes one of the most important plays of the passion group for its characterization of Pilate.<sup>13</sup> By offering a dropped York Play as the source for the Towneley *Talents* and by dating the borrowing not later than the second decade of the fifteenth century, Frampton raises several problems.

It is not the purpose of this study either to prove or to disprove the theories of the textual critics, or indeed to throw any new light, except in the course of doing something else, on the vexing problems of the composition of the Towneley Cycle. If, however, the Towneley Cycle is borrowed in large part from York, or stems from the same parent-cycle, how can one account for the utter difference in the two Pilates? If the plays in which Pilate appears belong to different strata in the cycle, if Pilate's speeches are by different hands and written at different times, how explain the consistency of characterization? Or does, in fact, the characterization of Pilate belong primarily to the sections written by the Wakefield Master or to any single one of the other strata? Can we divide the characterization of Pilate into strata to correspond with those into which the textual critics have divided the plays? These are questions which demand answers of some kind.

A line-by-line analysis<sup>14</sup> makes it abundantly clear that the characterization of Pilate is peculiar to no one of the several strata into which Towneley is divided by the textual critics. He characterizes himself, directly or indirectly, or is characterized by others in the nine-line stanza of the Wakefield Master, in the eight- and four-line stanzas of the so-called Northern Septenar portions, in an unusual thirteen-line stanza at the beginning of the *Scourging*, in the seven-line stanza of the *Talents*, and in the Burns stanza of the *Resurrection*.

Of the common stanzaic forms found in Towneley, only the *rime couée* contains no significant contribution to the characterization of Pilate. The only *rime couée* stanzas which Pilate speaks are in the

12. *The Wakefield Group in the Towneley Cycle*, pp. 217-30, 237-44.

13. "The Processus Talentorum (Towneley XXIV)," *PMLA* LIX (1944), 946-54.

14. Presented in the appendix.



*Crucifixion*, when he welcomes Joseph of Arimathea and grants him Jesus' body<sup>15</sup> — both actions performed in a spirit rather alien to the Towneley Pilate as we see him elsewhere. If, as Pollard thinks, the *rime couée* stanzas are the first stratum of Towneley, remnants of an old narrative cycle, then this brief scene is the only remainder of an earlier, rather neutral Pilate, like the one in the Chester Cycle. What appears to be a corrupted *rime couée* stanza occurs earlier in the *Crucifixion*. Pilate here replies to the Torturers, who have protested the wording of the legend on the cross, by telling them to mind their own business.<sup>16</sup> This is thoroughly in keeping with the characterization of Pilate elsewhere, and it is perhaps significant that the speech shows verbal parallelism with York.

If we leave the *rime couée* parts out of consideration (the total lines given to Pilate in the two passages number only ten), we still have noteworthy contributions to the characterization in five different verse media. It is appropriate then, to attempt some sort of classification and apportionment. Although there are no serious inconsistencies in Pilate's character throughout the six plays in which he figures (including the *Buffeting*, where he is characterized by Caiaphas), perhaps more or less subtle differences can be noted and attached to one or other of the five verse media.

What of the contribution of the Wakefield Master? At least one of the older critics inclines to credit him with everything striking in the Towneley Pilate. Noting that Pilate is "the first trimmer in English comedy," Gayley writes, "His development continues through the first half of the Wakefield Scourging, and the whole of the *Talents*. . . . Like most of the characters created by the Master, he is of proverbial philosophy compact."<sup>17</sup> As we shall see later, Gayley is undoubtedly wrong in crediting the whole of the *Talents* to the Master. He is also wrong in viewing Pilate as a "trimmer." Nevertheless, the contribution of the Master deserves thorough study.

In the nine-line stanza of the Master are the opening speeches of

15. XXIII, 634-36, 640-42.

16. XXIII, 552-57.

17. P. 176.

two plays, the *Conspiracy* and *Talents*, a speech about Pilate in the *Buffeting*, and except for the opening boast, all Pilate's lines in the *Scourging*. The two opening speeches are very probably the Master's reworking of the conventional ranting and threatening speech of Pilate.<sup>18</sup> In the Master's version of this conventional rant, Pilate identifies himself with the Jews, as he does pretty much everywhere else in the Towneley plays:

that fature fals ihesus,  
That if he lyf a yere / dystroy *oure* law must vs.<sup>19</sup>

He shows considerable familiarity with Jesus' work and doctrines and manifests a determination to catch and punish the "lurden ledyr." Except for the spirit of the language in which this sentiment is couched, the speech contributes little to the characterization. Indeed, it is somewhat inconsistent with the rest of the play, in which, when Caiaphas and Annas ask Pilate's advice and detail Jesus' crimes, Pilate appears to know nothing about the matter.<sup>20</sup>

However, an important characterization appears in this first speech of Pilate, the lines in which Pilate describes his own crookedness:

My self if I it say / as men of cowrte now can;  
Supporte a man to day / to-morn agans hym than,  
On both parties thus I play / And fenys me to ordan  
The right;  
Bot al fals indytars,  
Quest mangers and Iurers,  
And all thise fals out rydars  
Ar welcom to my sight<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps one ought to divide this speech into two matters. The last half portrays Pilate as a creature of duplicity and guile, friend of all

18. Compare York XXVI, 1-28, and two Towneley speeches in the same character but not in the Master's stanza: XX, 560-83 (probably once the beginning of a play) and XXVI, 1-36.

19. XX, 37-38. Italics mine.

20. Cady, "The Passion Group in Towneley," *MP*, X (1912-13), 590-91, points out this inconsistency.

21. XX, 20-27.

who live on the shady side of the law. This characteristic, the Master further develops in Caiaphas' doubts whether it is wise to send Jesus to Pilate for judgment:

ffor I am euer in drede / wandreth, and wo,  
lest pylate for mede / let ihesus go;

Bot gyftys marres many man.  
Bot he deme the sothe than,  
The dwill haue his bonys!<sup>22</sup>

This characteristic of shiftiness and double dealing is not, however, peculiar to the Pilate of the Master's parts. It appears even more vividly in the thirteen-line stanzas beginning the *Scourging* and throughout the *Talents*.

The implication that Pilate's duplicity is typical of "men of cowrte" contains that note of social criticism with which we are familiar in both Shepherd Plays, which mark the height of the Master's work. Is it individual to the Master? There is rather more than a suggestion of just this attitude towards Pilate in the *Talents*. Turning on the counsellor, who presumes to give Pilate advice, Pilate curses him:

Therfor the devyll the spede, thou carle vnkynde  
Sich felowse myght well be on rowme!  
Ye know not the comon cowers that longys to a kyng.<sup>23</sup>

The fling at the "men of cowrte" is not then solely the Master's property, albeit he does it with more force and appropriateness than the author of *Talents*.

The opening speech of *Talents*, the second of the harangues written for Pilate in the Master's stanza, is notable more for its comic mixture of Latin and English than for any dramatic addition to the characterization of Pilate. It is, even more than the opening speech of *Conspiracy*, a re-doing of the conventional bombast with which Pilate commonly quelled the noisy crowd. One line, "kyng atus gate me of pila," is interesting as an allusion to the Pilate legend and would be valuable if more of the scenes in which Pilate appears were in the Master's stanza, or if we had any reason to believe him responsible

22. XXI, 434-41.

23. XXIV, 223-25.



for parts not in his stanza. As it stands, the whole speech has little to do with the rest of the play, and little contribution to make to the total impression of Pilate, unless, with Gayley, one considers him a comic character instead of a tragic.

The chief opportunity the Master has to handle Pilate is in the *Scourging*, where the section in which Pilate appears is, with the exception of his opening speech, wholly in the Master's stanza. The scene in which Jesus is brought before Pilate for judgment — the crucial scene of the whole Passion Group — is handled with undeniable dramatic skill. Pilate's part is cut to the bone. He makes a show of giving Jesus a fair trial by refusing to crucify Jesus "with outten any red." He satisfies the scriptural requirements by saying that Herod could find no fault in Jesus and by washing his hands. His offer to release a criminal is almost off-handed, and his quickness to order Jesus scourged betrays his real intentions. A speech in which Pilate calls on Jesus to work a miracle, usually given to Herod in other passion plays, shows Pilate's gift for cruel mockery, and his apology to Jesus is in keeping with his duplicity:

Thay putt on the greatt blame,  
Els myght [thou] skap for me.<sup>24</sup>

Especially noteworthy in the Master's handling of the condemnation scene is the absence of those qualities for which he is most often praised: vivid, boisterous humor and pithy phrase. Their presence in this most tragic of scenes would almost certainly be a flaw. If the Master really originated the dramatic handling of the trial and condemnation before Pilate, instead of merely rephrasing and touching up an older play, he deserves the highest praise for dramatic craftsmanship. Moreover, his contributions to the characterization of Pilate are of the first importance.<sup>25</sup>

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24. XXII, 195-96.

25. Also involved in any discussion of the contribution of the Master to the characterization of Pilate is the question of the omission of the trial before Herod. The standard pattern of this section of the passion story is (1) a first trial before Pilate in which the Jews accuse Jesus of preaching from "here to Galilee," (2) Pilate's reference of the case to Herod when he hears that Jesus is from Galilee, (3) a trial before Herod, in which Herod asks for a miracle, Jesus remains silent, and Herod returns Him to Pilate

The convincingness of the Master's handling depends, however, on the four opening thirteen-line stanzas. In them, Pilate characterizes himself as

full of sotelty  
ffalshed, gyll, and trechery.<sup>26</sup>

He boasts of the way he works the law to his advantage:

The right side to socoure, certys, I am full bayne,  
If I may get therby a vantage or wynyng;  
Then to the fals parte I turne me agayn,  
ffor I se more Vayll will to me be risyng . . .<sup>27</sup>

Then he repeats almost verbatim the lines at the opening of the *Conspiracy* about false indictors, questmongers, jurors, and outriders.

This is mostly build-up to render credible Pilate's part in the trial which is to follow. After outlining his craftiness and duplicity, Pilate goes on to explain that "oure prynces" (again the identification of Pilate with the Jews) have this night taken a prophet, whom they call Christ, and who will be brought before Pilate:

I shall fownde to be his freynd vtward, in certayn,  
And shew hym fare cowntenance and wordys of vanyte;

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after addressing Him as a fool; and (4) the second trial before Pilate. This pattern is followed in the other three English cycles, and in the overwhelming majority of continental passion plays. In Towneley alone is there no handling of a trial before Herod.

Critics have generally assumed that there was a trial before Herod in Towneley, which was later dropped, or which has not been preserved in the manuscript. Cady, "Passion Group," p. 587, speaks of the dropping of plays because of the "superior interest" of the Master's work. The chief support for the contention that Towneley originally had a trial before Herod is two references in the *Scourging*. The First Torturer says, as he brings Jesus before Pilate. "I haue ron that I swett/from sir herode oure kyng." (XXII, 53.) Pilate says that Herod could find no fault in Jesus:

Herod truly as stone/coud fund with nokyns gyn  
Nothyng herapon/that pent to any syn. (XXII, 99-100)

These references, however, do not prove that at the time the Master wrote or re-wrote the *Scourging* there was any Trial before Herod. They can prove just as easily that the Master was covering up the absence of any such play. It is also possible that he introduced these references because of the dropping of the Herod play. There is one suggestion that the play has been purposefully dropped either at the time of the Master's revision or before. Pilate asks Jesus to show some miracle: "Of thy greatt warkes shew vs some skyll" (XXII, 190). This request is elsewhere put in Herod's mouth.

26. XXII, 10-11.

27. *Ibid.*, ll. 16-19.

Bot or this day at nyght on crosse shall he be slayn,  
Thus agans hym in my hart I bere great enmyte. . . .<sup>28</sup>

This remarkable dramatic tour de force makes possible the reconciliation of the concept of Pilate as the chief villain of the Passion with the actions and attitudes with which Scripture invests him. Only an arch-hypocrite could preside over the council of the Jews in which the capture of Jesus is plotted and then wash his hands of the blood of innocence. If we knew who wrote those lines at the opening of the *Scourging*, we should know who made the major contribution to the Towneley characterization of Pilate.

Two critics have assigned the four thirteen-line stanzas to the Master.<sup>29</sup> Their reasons are mainly two: the similarity between the thirteen-line stanza and the Master's nine-line stanza, and the similarity in tone and style between this passage and the Master's work.<sup>30</sup> Both reasons seem to me somewhat unsubstantial. Either the Master wrote the well-known nine-line stanza, with easily recognizable variations, or he wrote a number of stanzaic forms. If the latter, then we had better abandon altogether the task of fixing his canon on the basis of stanzaic form, for qualities so incapable of objective measurement as tone, style, raciness, vividness, proverbiality can never afford adequate criteria for attribution. Certainly, one can find other passages, particularly in the *Talents*, as racy and vivid as this — and incidentally in a stanza with anapestic movement and a mixture of long and short lines.<sup>31</sup>

28. *Ibid.*, ll. 31–34.

29. See appendix, p. 86.

30. The repetition of the lines about questmongers, *et al.* is hardly a reason. If the Master and the writer of the thirteen-line stanzas are two men, the later could easily have copied them from the earlier.

31. For instance, this one:

*primus tortor.* Thou wrought no dyssaytt, for sothe, that we saw,  
ffor-thi thou art worthi, and won is this weyd At thyn awne wyll.

*pilatus.* yee, bot me pays not that playng to puf nor to blaw;  
If he haue right I ne rek or reson thertyll,

I refe it hym noght

*Tercius tortor.* haue gud day, sir, and grefe you not yll,  
ffor if it were duble full dere is it boght.

(XXIV, 344–40)



It seems, therefore, the part of wisdom to leave these four stanzas unassigned, and to credit the Master only with a dramatically effective development of the idea which they contain. We can summarize the Master's certain contribution to the characterization of Pilate thus: he makes vivid the duplicity of Pilate. He gives edge to this characterization by reference to the ways of courtiers and men in high place. He develops, or at least phrases, one of the finest pictures of a rigged trial in English literature. The last is cardinal to the whole portrayal of Pilate's character. The others are mere refinements.

If the material in the thirteen-line stanzas is the brightest spot in the Towneley characterization of Pilate, the handling of Pilate in the *Talents* is inferior as dramatic composition only in the lesser importance of the action. The characterization is brilliant, with the added interest that it is done in action rather than by soliloquy. It is little wonder that Gayley and others who regard the Master as the author of all the best things in Towneley should credit the whole of *Talents* to him. That the main action of the play is not the work of the Master is made clear by Frampton, who divides the play into three layers, an original play and two interpolations. The main play, Frampton makes it almost certain, is an imperfect transmission of a play which came into the York Cycle somewhat after 1415 and was dropped before 1422.<sup>32</sup> The two interpolations involve stanzas 10-20 in *rime couée* containing the speeches of the three Torturers as they come to Pilate's house, and stanzas 56-59 in the Master's stanza consisting of moralization by the Torturers on the evils of gambling. Neither of these interpolations contains any lines by Pilate, and the opening speech by Pilate in the Master's stanza makes, as we have seen, no noteworthy contribution to the characterization.

The main portion of the play, written in a seven-line stanza unique in Towneley and frequently garbled in the manuscript, presents an unforgettable study of Pilate, the procurator of Judea who does not hesitate to shoot dice with common hangmen. When one of them fairly wins the seamless (and magical) coat of Jesus, Pilate uses his

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32. "The Processus Talentorum (Towneley XXIV)" *PMLA*, LIX (1944), 646-54.

rank to get the garment himself. Every device of a skillful dramatist is used to achieve this picture. The duplicity and cruelty of Pilate appear in his treatment of the Consultus,<sup>33</sup> so that the audience is well prepared for the main action of the play. The Torturers are suspicious of Pilate's honesty and impartiality. Two of them insist that Pilate is not to get the gown.<sup>34</sup> When Pilate indicates the division of the garment, he takes the biggest piece himself and leaves the three Torturers but shreds.<sup>35</sup> His suggestion that they dispose of the garment by drawing cuts meets the counter suggestion to use dice, for, says First Torturer, "at the dysyng he dos vs no wrang."<sup>36</sup> Surely this is deft dramaturgy, on a par with any in the Towneley Cycle.<sup>37</sup>

Only one critic, Frampton, considers *Talents* borrowed from York. All agree that the major portion of the *Conspiracy*, all except the beginning in the Master's stanza and a short passage in the thirteen-line stanza, is related somehow to York. Hohlfeld puts it in his third category.<sup>38</sup> Pollard, Cady, and Frank all regard *Conspiracy* as borrowed, though Cady thinks the passages in quatrains represent a later editing. Lyle regards the play as one from the parent-cycle.

The Pilate of the *Conspiracy* is somewhat less vivid than that of *Talents*, but he consistently and satisfactorily performs his part as chief villain in the passion group. He early assumes the position of leader in the movement to take and punish Jesus. When Caiaphas and Annas urge action, he at once agrees and starts thinking of means:

Bot yit som fawt must we feyll  
Wherfor that he shuld dy.<sup>39</sup>

His very presence in the counsel of the Jews makes him in his attitude one of the Jews, and he speaks throughout the passion group of "our"

33. XXIV, 209-25.

34. *Ibid.*, ll. 163-64, 167-68.

35. *Ibid.*, ll. 256-68.

36. *Ibid.*, ll. 303-06.

37. The *rime couée* stanzas, considered by Frampton as an interpolation, make one small contribution. One of the Torturers explains that the garment has magical properties (ll. 105-08). Perhaps this establishes Pilate's motivation. Cp. above pp. 10-11.

38. I.e. those having general agreement with York but not having parallel passages.

39. XX, 88-89.

laws.<sup>40</sup> The broad outlines of Pilate's character and the position he is to play in the five plays are thus set in the *Conspiracy*.

Pilate is not, however, here the scheming, treacherous double dealer whom we meet in the Master's portions, the thirteen-line stanzas, and the *Talents*. The unloveliness of his character is conveyed by cruder and more obvious means. The Pilate of the Northern Septenar portion of the *Conspiracy* is probably a remnant of the ranting, raging tyrant who carried a club in the Coventry Cycle and whose voice impressed Chaucer. He is forever swearing or cursing someone. When Annas accuses Jesus of paying no attention to the high priests, he exclaims, "yei dewill!"<sup>41</sup> A few lines further on, he is swearing by "mahowns bloode so dere" that Jesus will pay for this sabbath-breaking. He flies into a rage at any provocation. When the soldiers say that had they known Pilate wanted Jesus, they would have brought him long since, Pilate curses them:

The dwill, he hang you high to dry!<sup>42</sup>

He has to be restrained by Caiaphas from too hasty arrest of Jesus. Judas almost fails to get a hearing because of Pilate's hot temper.

Without doubt, this is a cruder conception of Pilate's character than that elsewhere in the passion group. Yet the Northern Septenar stanzas of the *Conspiracy* contain some fine touches. There is, for instance, the suddenness with which Pilate's attitude towards Judas changes when Judas makes the offer of betrayal. From commanding his soldiers to lay hands on Judas, Pilate changes to the epitome of hospitality and sympathy.<sup>43</sup> Best of all is the irrepressible energy with which Pilate reviews and exhorts the soldiers going to capture Jesus and hangs about the flanks as they execute their task. When they bring Jesus to him, Pilate has to exult over the captive. Are you the one, he asks, who has caused us all the trouble?

40. In every stratum of the passion group there is at least one use of "our" in this sense. Master's stanza: XX, 38; York borrowing in *Conspiracy*: XX, 577; thirteen-line stanza: XXII, 27; seven-line stanza of *Talents*: XXIV, 49; *Resurrection*: XXVI, 524-25.

41. XX, 106.

42. XX, 162.

43. XX, 190-93.



Thou passys cesar bi dede,  
or sir herode oure kyng.<sup>44</sup>

His ranting is deftly developed and well motivated. When the soldiers suggest immediately killing Jesus, he is emphatic in rejecting such a course:

Peasse, harlottis, the dwell you spede!  
Wold ye thus preuaily morder a man?<sup>45</sup>

No indeed! Pilate intends to murder him publicly, and Pilate will be in the spotlight as judge.

Although the major portions of *Talents* and *Conspiracy* are only suspected of being closely akin to the York Cycle, the last play in which the Towneley Pilate appears is almost identical with the York *Resurrection*, and there is thus no doubt of its derivation. The only considerable differences between the two cycles in the sections in which Pilate appears are at the beginning and towards the end. Otherwise the two plays, so far as Pilate is concerned, are identical except for insignificant verbal variations.

The characterization of Pilate in *Resurrection* is of a piece with that in the preceding Towneley Plays, somewhat more akin to the Northern Septenar portions than to the more sophisticated handling of *Talents* and the portions in the Master's and the thirteen-line stanzas. When Centurion reports the marvels that accompanied the crucifixion and will not recant his belief that a great wrong has been committed, Pilate rages at him:

harlot! wherto commys thou vs emang  
with sich lesyngys vs to fang?  
Weynd furth! hy myght thou hang,  
Vyle fatur!<sup>46</sup>

In similar vein he curses the soldier who reports the resurrection:

Therfor the devill the all to-draw,  
vyle recrayd knyght!<sup>47</sup>

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44. XX, 720-21.

45. XX, 736-37.

46. XXVI, 140-43.

47. *Ibid.*, ll. 506-07.

Perhaps the Pilate of *Resurrection* is slightly less sure of himself than the Pilate of *Conspiracy* and *Talents*, but the difference is little, and anyway it is quite plausible that Centurion's reports would shake the confidence even of Pilate.

The few passages concerning Pilate in which the Towneley *Resurrection* differs from York are worthy of note. The openings of the two plays are quite different. Towneley opens with Pilate's characteristic threatening harangue. He especially breathes fire at "any felowse" who follow Jesus' teaching. If Annas and Caiaphas know any such, Pilate will see that they are properly punished:

with tormentys keyn bese he indost  
ffor euer more  
the devill to hell shall harry hys goost. . . .<sup>48</sup>

The Pilate of York opens the play in much milder mood. He is apparently worried and asks Caiaphas for counsel.<sup>49</sup> Caiaphas' reassurance that Centurion has everything well in hand, the place at which the two plays begin their identity, thus comes somewhat more naturally in York than in Towneley.

Three other variations occur after the news of the resurrection is brought to Pilate and the priests. After the soldiers have told how they quaked for dread when the stone rolled back and they heard melody such as they never yet had heard, the Towneley Pilate exclaims:

Alas, then ar oure lawes forlorne  
ffor euer more!<sup>50</sup>

In York, this speech is given to Caiaphas.<sup>51</sup> The difference is immense. Towneley's assignment identifies Pilate with the Jews, as he has been identified throughout the passion group. It continues the portrayal of Pilate as chief antagonist, whose motive in the succeeding bribery of the soldiers, is thus more than mere face-saving.

Another similar shift is also indicative. In York it is Annas who works out the details of the bribe to keep the soldiers quiet; let them

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48. XXVI, 33-35.

49. York XXXVIII, 1-12.

50. Towneley XXVI, 524-25.

51. York XXXVIII, 387-88.

say that twenty thousand men came and nearly slew them.<sup>52</sup> In Towneley, Annas merely suggests that the soldiers be bribed.<sup>53</sup> Pilate supplies the story which they are to tell.

The last appearance of the two Pilates is perhaps of less significance. The Towneley Pilate only bestows the blessing of Mahound on his soldiers, as the play turns to the scene between Mary Magdalen and Jesus. The York Pilate does not leave the stage so unceremoniously. He has a curtain speech (for the Magdalen scene is a separate play in York) in which he philosophizes about his action in bribing the soldiers:

Thus schall þe sothe be bought and solde,  
And treasoune schall for trewthe be told. . . .<sup>54</sup>

It is the close relationship between the York and Towneley Cycles that makes the question of the originality of Towneley's characterization of Pilate so puzzling. On the one hand, over half the sections of Towneley which deal with Pilate are somehow related to the York Cycle: the main portion of the *Conspiracy*, most of *Talents*, and the whole of *Resurrection*, except for the passages we have just noticed. These sections, if abstracted from the rest of the plays, contain a perfectly consistent characterization of Pilate as the principal villain. The parts in the Master's stanza and the thirteen-line stanzas add only more subtlety and sophistication to the picture. Yet the characterization of Pilate in York is almost completely opposed in spirit and tone.

So far as I have observed, only one critic has noticed the difference between the two Pilates and has attempted an explanation. Lyle views the Towneley *Conspiracy*, in which the difference appears most prominently, as representative of the original "parent-cycle." The parallel York Plays, the *Conspiracy* (XXVI), and the *Agony and Betrayal* (XXVIII) are revisions, made, according to Lyle, "to bring the character of Pilate into closer conformity with scriptural accounts by making him kindlier in his attitude toward Jesus and anxious to avoid

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52. York XXXVIII, 407-12.

53. Towneley XXVI, 545-49. The sums of the bribe differ also: the York soldiers get only £1000, the Towneley soldiers £10,000.

54. York XXXVII, 449-50.



injustice.”<sup>55</sup> This theory goes far toward explaining how York and Towneley can have such structural similarities, even verbal parallels, and yet be so different in characterization. It also explains the awkward dramaturgy of the York *Conspiracy*, where Pilate participates in the council, but is entirely opposed to its purposes.

The theory, however, runs into certain difficulties. A far more effective characterization of a kindly Pilate would have been achieved by dropping him entirely from the *Conspiracy*, as he is dropped entirely in the York *Agony and Betrayal* (XXVIII), which corresponds with the last of the three sections of the Towneley *Conspiracy*.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the characterization of Pilate is not consistent in the York passion and resurrection groups. The Pilate of the York *Resurrection* is, as we have seen, fundamentally the Towneley Pilate. This might be explained as the preservation, unmodified, of the Pilate of the “parent-cycle.” So might other inconsistencies, if they occurred in the older strata of York. But what of the Pilate of the “purchase of the field of blood” scene, with which York XXXII ends? In this scene, Pilate is the same crafty, unscrupulous schemer we know well in the Towneley *Talents* and the thirteen-line stanza opening of the *Scourging*. He is represented as cheating a knight out of his property and then mocking the victim.<sup>57</sup> There is no reason to suppose that this scene is a retention of old matter, not adapted to a later conception of character. To the contrary, it looks like a later addition. It is in the manner of the later “realistic school” and does not seem to be described in Burton’s 1415 summaries of the York Cycle.<sup>58</sup>

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55. *Original Identity*, p. 78. See also note 67 on the same page: “This difference in the conception of Pilate’s character is seen in all the Passion plays of the two cycles. In Towneley, his attitude is as brutal and scheming as is that of the high priests. This must have been the view of the parent-cycle, preserved now in the Towneley Plays, but modified in the York revisions.”

56. The Towneley *Conspiracy* is obviously, as Lyle hints, a coalescence of at least two, perhaps three, plays. One proof is the ranting speech of Pilate, XX, 560–83, which is exactly the same in content and purpose as the other speeches with which Pilate opens the plays in which he appears.

57. York, XXXII, 338–89.

58. Burton’s list gives the play thus: “Pilatus, Anna, Cayphas, due Judei, et Judas reportans eis argentos.” Smith, *York Plays*, p. xxiv. Here is no mention of the “Armiger” who is cheated out of his land.

Even more do these objections apply if we follow Frampton in regarding *Talents* as a discarded York Play, which did not come into the cycle until after 1415 and was dropped before 1422. The characterization of Pilate in this play, which is relatively late, is extremely similar to the more subtle characterization in the Wakefield parts of Towneley and in the thirteen-line stanzas.

Finally, there are the differences between the York and Towneley versions of the *Resurrection*. As we have seen, the two plays have different openings; a speech to the effect that "our" laws are forlorn given to Annas in York is given to Pilate in Towneley; and Pilate suggests details of the bribery of the soldiers in Towneley, Annas in York. Is there any way of ascertaining whether York or Towneley is the original version? According to Lyle's theory, it ought to be Towneley, since the York version modifies Pilate's characterization slightly towards the more kindly Pilate. Yet there is no way to prove that Towneley does not rather represent the revision. The stanzaic form gives no satisfactory evidence. The different openings are both in the "Burns" stanza, as are the identical portions. Interpolations in the Towneley version are also in the Burns stanza: two of the three stanzas of the Centurion's description of the marvels attending the crucifixion<sup>59</sup> (the eleven-line third stanza may well be a corruption of the Burns stanza), and part of the concluding scene between Jesus and Mary Magdalen.<sup>60</sup> The concluding philosophical speech of the York Pilate is in the Burns stanza, but the one line blessing with which the Towneley Pilate quits the stage seems to be detached from any stanza.<sup>61</sup> In so far as stanzaic forms prove anything, the revision ought rather to be in Towneley than in York, and I rather suspect that it is so. But the data are entirely too meager to be conclusive.

The question whether the Towneley Pilate is basically a creation borrowed from York seems impossible to answer finally. Either the evidence is too scanty, or else no critic has been able to interpret it

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59. XXVI, 51-73.

60. Ll. 562-634.

61. It does not seem to be part of stanza 94, where it is put in the EETS edition, for without it the stanza is the regular Burns stanza.

properly. Certain conclusions are, however, almost inescapable. For one, it is unlikely that the characterization of Pilate is the result of a long development within the Towneley Cycle itself. In fact, it is unlikely that there is any Towneley Cycle, properly speaking, in the sense that there is a York Cycle or a Chester Cycle. Rather, Towneley seems to be a patchwork, put together rather late, and not representing any long local tradition at Wakefield, the supposed home of Towneley.<sup>62</sup>

As a hypothesis, let us suppose the following: Partly as an influence of the legend of the evil Pilate and partly as a development of an actor tradition of playing Pilate as a ranting tyrant, there developed certain plays containing at least the germ of the conception of Pilate as a villain. Lyle thinks this was the original characterization of Pilate in the York Cycle; that it permeated the whole cycle is perhaps difficult to believe, but that it was present in one or more of the separate plays is entirely likely. It is also quite possible that several cycles not now extant, Beverley and Lincoln, for instance, contained in one or more plays a similar conception of Pilate. Thus, within a radius of fifty or sixty miles of Wakefield, the presumed home of Towneley, there may have been several dramatic representations of the passion in which Pilate was treated as a villain.

About 1420 the city authorities of Wakefield, which was rapidly becoming a commercial center of importance, decided to inaugurate a cycle of plays. Everything we know about the authorship of medieval drama indicates that a cycle so initiated would be a patchwork, based on some existing cycle or cycles of plays, which would then be more or less edited and interpolated to form a new cycle. Now, the authorities of Wakefield appoint some individual or individuals to assemble the new cycle. This individual, struck with the dramatic validity of one or more plays containing a villainous Pilate, decides that the character of

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62. All Frampton's evidence points that way: "The Date of the 'Wakefield Master': Bibliographical Evidence," *PMLA*, LIII (1938), 86-117. Note particularly the evidence of the inability of Wakefield to support a cycle of plays (pp. 116-17), a circumstance which leads Chambers, *English Literature*, p. 35 to argue for a date after 1425 or thereabouts, when Wakefield became prosperous and a cycle of plays becomes a possibility.



Pilate in the cycle which he is putting together shall be that of a villain.<sup>63</sup> He therefore chooses only plays or parts of plays which present Pilate in this light. Perhaps he removes sections suggesting a kindlier Pilate, revises and edits all into reasonable conformity to this dominating conception. He can, then, borrow *Talents* and *Resurrection* from York, for their Pilates harmonize with the overall plan. Perhaps also an earlier York *Conspiracy*, in which Pilate is not treated sympathetically is available to him. Because this assembler has a deeper understanding of the nature of dramatic conflict than most of his contemporaries, the result of his patchwork is of a high artistic order.

This is only a hypothesis. I cannot prove it. Its only merit is that it accounts for the Towneley Pilate as we have him, and it does not, so far as I know, contradict any known facts about the origin of the Towneley Cycle, or of cycles in general. It is not, moreover, necessary to insist on every detail of the hypothesis as presented above. The Towneley Cycle may not have been put together at Wakefield, but elsewhere. There may have been one assembler or a group of assemblers. If there was one, he may have been the Wakefield Master, or he may have been another.<sup>64</sup> None of these details affect the essentials of the hypothesis.

In fact, the only essential of the hypothesis is that the characterization of Pilate in Towneley is the result of purposeful choice, probably by one individual working according to a conscious and deliberate plan. The uniqueness of the Towneley Pilate is precisely this: that through a group of plays of apparently diverse origins and by different hands runs a consistent characterization. In a patchwork, assembled cycle, this consistency can hardly have arisen by accident. No more can it be ascribed to any kind of genetic evolution.

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63. In assuming that a person assembling a cycle of plays about 1420 would have some freedom of choice, I am not, I believe, exceeding the bounds of probability. Certainly at that date, one could have seen a great variety of passion plays within a radius of fifty miles of Wakefield.

64. I prefer to believe that the assembler was not the Master. The genius of the author of *Second Shepherds'* seems to be of a different kind from that of the assembler of the passion and resurrection group. I also believe that the assembler was the earlier of the two, succeeded ten or twenty years later by the Master, who stuck to the main lines of dramatic development, but refined details.

The hypothesis presented above has a further advantage. It somewhat restricts the period during which the Towneley Cycle was evolving. It seems likely that the reason for the inconsistencies of the York Pilate is, at least partially, the long period during which the cycle was being revised, not as a whole but play by play, to meet the exigencies of guild organization.<sup>65</sup> The continual revision of individual plays would certainly tend to destroy the unity of dramatic conception. If, therefore, Towneley was assembled in the 1420's, if the Master did his work before 1450, as Frampton argues,<sup>66</sup> and if the manuscript comes from the third quarter of the fifteenth century, there was not so great a chance for the unity of characterization to be lost in later revisions, as it apparently was in York.

Since all available evidence indicates that the basic conception of the Towneley Pilate is present in the very early stratum of Towneley — but not in the earliest, if we accept Pollard's theory that the *rime couée* parts represent the original cycle — the role of the Master and other later revisers can hardly have been more than that of adding subtlety to the character, increasing its social significance, and pointing up its vividness. They already had, when they commenced their work, a well developed dramatic representation of the legendary evil Pilate, and they already had considerably more than the framework of the powerful tragic conception of Pilate as the chief antagonist in the tragedy of the passion.

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65. See Grace Frank, "Revisions in the English Mystery Plays," *MP*, XV (1917-18).

66. "The Date of the Flourishing of the Wakefield Master," *PMLA*, L (1935), 631-60.

## CONCLUSIONS

The final purpose of such a study as this ought to be critical. We have assembled a considerable body of information and drawn some conclusions about the literary phenomenon of the Towneley Pilate. It is now time to review these conclusions, to construct them into a pattern, and to see their bearing on the whole question of the artistic achievements of the English scriptural drama of the middle ages.

Among the materials out of which the Towneley Pilate is constructed are the legend of the evil Pilate and the actor tradition of playing Pilate as a raging tyrant. Some crude development of a villainous Pilate was very likely present in the plays known to the assembler of the Towneley Cycle. This assembler perceived the utility of characterizing Pilate as a villain. At once, it solved many of the inconsistencies characteristic of other medieval passion plays, it provided an antagonist and clarified the conflict necessary to drama, and it heightened the dramatic contrast between the forces of good, personified in Jesus, and the forces of evil, personified in Pilate.

The concept of Pilate as a tyrant was consistent with other attitudes characteristic of Towneley. Perhaps the most notable of these is the protest against injustice and oppression by the upper classes. The Towneley Cycle is especially well-known for its treatment of tyranny and for its voicing of the grievances of the lower classes. Pilate is perhaps the most interesting of the tyrants of Towneley. He is not conceived as a vague, generalized tyrant. He embodies a very special form of oppression, the manipulation of the law, a vice against which preachers and moralists inveighed and kings and parliaments acted, too often in vain. Pilate is not only the bribed judge, he symbolizes all the evils of maladministration of justice: the perjured juror, the false indictor, and all the rest. This identification of Pilate with an odious class is an invitation to the audience to hate him.

The means used to objectify this concept of Pilate as a villain are nearly always adequate and often brilliant. The person or persons re-



sponsible for the passion and resurrection plays in Towneley show an excellent grasp of such dramatic expedients as concentration, focus, and contrast. By omission not merely of apocryphal and legendary material but even of material contained in Scripture, like Peter's denial and the trial before Herod, the Towneley passion group concentrates attention on Pilate. He is in nearly every scene, and when not physically present, as in the *Buffeting*, reference to him substitutes for his presence. Many an Elizabethan, many a modern play shows less understanding of the dramatic principle of unity than the Towneley passion group.

The great puzzle is how this concentration, consistency, and architectural unity is obtained. If it occurred in one of the developed continental plays, such as *Greban*, which was written at one time by one person, it would be noteworthy, but not surprising. But Towneley is demonstrably a patch-work cycle, divisible into several strata. Yet all but one of the strata notably develop the over-all concept of Pilate as a villain. Despite some unevenness in execution, the whole shows an appreciable unity of tone and mood.

One cannot escape the conclusion that the coalescence of so many elements, all fitted together according to a discoverable plan, can hardly be accidental. At some time in the history of the Towneley Cycle, an author or an editor — conceivably a closely cooperating group of authors or editors — purposefully framed the pattern of dramatic development which we now see. If plays or portions of plays were borrowed, they had to fit the governing concept of Pilate's character. If excision or interpolation was necessary, parts inconsistent with this concept were omitted, interpolations consistent with the concept were written. Additions and developments were allowed when they contributed to the more vivid portrayal of an evil Pilate, not allowed when they did not. No other explanation fits the observed facts.

The characterization of Pilate which emerges from this process is a tremendous dramatic achievement, in some respects beyond anything else in English drama before the Elizabethan period. The Towneley passion group marks a vast progress towards true tragedy. Some, even, of the devices for which Shakespeare is praised appear al-

ready developed in Towneley, most notably the employment of grim humor in *Talents* as a relief to the dramatic tension of the preceding *Crucifixion*. However, this achievement of Towneley in the direction of developing tragedy is not made at the expense of the fundamental purpose of scriptural drama. Unlike Towneley's companion development in comedy, the *Second Shepherds' Play*, the characterization of Pilate and the structure of the passion group are not side issues. They are central to the passion group. Towneley's representation of the religious meaning of the passion and resurrection is better, not worse, for the characterization of Pilate — not truer to Scripture, but, in terms of the level of the audience, a truer exposition of that conflict between good and evil which is the essential meaning of the passion and the resurrection.





## APPENDIX

The clearest demonstration of the unity and consistency of the characterization of Pilate is a line by line analysis of the six plays in which Pilate appears or is referred to. Such analyses have been made before, but never on the principle of following through a single character to see if the changes in strata within the plays affect the consistency of characterization.

The following tables list and summarize every speech in which Pilate characterizes himself or is characterized by someone else. Following the summary of the speech is the stanza and line reference, then in the next column, a metrical description of the passage, and, in the third column, a summary of the stratum assigned to the passage by the various textual critics.<sup>1</sup>

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1. In the last column, I have had to project the theories of textual critics, perhaps beyond their intentions. None of them gives a stanza by stanza or line by line analysis of a single play in which Pilate appears. Their discussions of individual passages are always illustrative, and even these rarely are of passages important to the characterization of Pilate. Thus, I have had to suppose that if (e.g.) X assigns certain couplets spoken by Jesus in the *Crucifixion* to the second stage of Towneley, he would also assign couplets spoken by Pilate in the *Conspiracy* to the same stage. Perhaps this is unfair. It seems, to me, however, a fair test of the competence of the theory. I have indicated such ascriptions by question marks.

## THE CONSPIRACY (XX)

Pilate's opening boasting speech: he commands silence. He is grand-sir of Mahound and can make or mar a man. False indictors, questmongers, jurors, and false outriders are welcome to him. He has heard of Jesus, who will destroy "our laws." That false faitour says that there are three persons in one God, and that he was born of a maiden, and will be crucified.

(sts. 1-6, ll. 1-53)

[Caiaphas and Annas urge action against Jesus]

Pilate agrees. They must find some privy point to mar Jesus' might.

(st. 9; ll. 70-73)

[Caiaphas and Annas enlarge the danger of Jesus]

Pilate repeats that they must find some fault for which he should die.

(st. 12; ll. 8-89)

9 line aaaacdddc

bbbb

(Wakefield

Stanza)

Wakefield Master (all)

Revision by Master of an earlier play  
(Cady)

Addition to earlier play (Lyle)

8 line: abababab

(called Northern

Septenar by critics)

York Parent-cycle (Davidson) to  
stanza 49

York borrowing (Pollard, Cady)  
Parent-cycle (Lyle)

quatrain abab

(Northern Sep-

tenar)

York borrowing (Pollard)

Parent-cycle (Lyle)

Quatrain editor (Cady?)

[Caiaphas and Annas rehearse Jesus' offenses] Pilate exclaims, "Yei dwill!" Will they bear witness against him? Such crimes come under Pilate's judgment. (st. 15; ll. 106-09)	quatrain Septenar	York borrowing (Pollard) Parent-cycle (Lyle) Quatrain editor (Cady?)
[Caiaphas adds that Jesus breaks the Sabbath] Pilate swears Jesus will abide that. (st. 16; ll. 116-19)	12 line Septenar	York borrowing (Pollard, Cady?) Parent-cycle (Lyle)
[Annas: he calls himself heaven's king]  Pilate swears by Mahound's blood he will suffer. (st. 17; ll. 124-25)	8 line Septenar	York borrowing (Cady, Pollard?) Parent-cycle (Lyle)
[1 and 2 Miles and Annas bring more accusations] Pilate asks who believes Jesus' preaching? (st. 19; ll. 140-41)		York borrowing (Pollard) Parent-cycle (Lyle) Quatrain editor (Cady)
[Caiaphas: everyone looks on him as a brother] Pilate commands his knights and knaves to slay Jesus. (st. 21; ll. 146-49)	quatrain Septenar	



[ 1 Miles says they will take Jesus in the Temple]	8 line Septenar	York borrowing (Cady, Pollard) Parent-cycle (Lyle)
Pilate swears. What's he doing there? He will pay for that. (st. 22; ll. 156-57)		
[ 2 Miles: if we had known we would have taken him before]		
Pilate curses knights and commands them to bring Jesus immediately. (st. 24; ll. 161-65)		
[ Caiaphas and Annas council caution]	quatrain Septenar	York borrowing (Pollard) Parent-cycle (Lyle) Quatrain editor (Cady)
Pilate agrees. [ Judas enters]		
Pilate curses Judas and tells him to go home. (st. 26; ll. 180-81)	8 line Septenar	York borrowing (Pollard, Cady) Parent-cycle (Lyle)
[ Caiaphas and Annas try to get rid of Judas]		
Pilate bids the knights to lay hands on Judas. He and his advisors are busy and need secrecy. (st. 28; ll. 190-93)		

[Judas tries to get them to listen] Pilate: Go hence. We have no time for you. (st. 30; ll. 200-01)	8 line Septenar	York borrowing (Pollard, Cady) Parent-cycle (Lyle)
[Judas offers to sell Jesus] Pilate immediately asks for more information. (st. 31; ll. 206-07)	quatrain Septenar	Quatrain editor (Cady)
[Judas identifies himself] Pilate welcomes him and bids him say what he will. (st. 32; ll. 214-15)		
[Caiaphas and Annas inquire further. Judas explains] Pilate asks the price. (st. 36; ll. 238-39)		
[Judas asks 30 pence and explains the sum] Pilate praises Judas; he is right to avenge himself on Jesus. (st. 44; ll. 282-85)	8 line Septenar	York borrowing (Pollard, Cady) Parent-cycle (Lyle)
[Annas promises the money and Judas renews the offer] Pilate tells Judas to keep the deal secret. (st. 46; ll. 294-97)		York borrowing (Pollard, Cady) Parent-cycle (Lyle)

[Caiaphas pays Judas. Annas asks how best to take Jesus]	8 line Septenar	York borrowing (Pollard, Cady) Parent-cycle (Lyle)
Pilate rejoices and commands knights to take the "fatur fals" at once. (st. 48; ll. 306-11)		
[The last supper]		
Pilate gives long ranting speech, commanding silence and threatening anyone who makes a noise. He calls on Judas to keep his promise. (st. 87-92; ll. 560-83)	quatrain Septenar	"Shows signs of connection with York plays . . . or was modeled on work of that school" (Davidson) York borrowing (Pollard) Parent-cycle (Lyle) Quatrain editor (Cady)
[Judas gives knights their directions]		
Pilate asks how they will know Jesus. (st. 94; ll. 588-89)		
[Judas says he will kiss Jesus]		
Pilate exhorts knights and orders Malcus to bear the lantern. (st. 95, 96; ll. 592-99)		
[The knights boast]		
Pilate salutes them as "curtes kasers of kamys kyn." (st. 101; ll. 639-42)	quatrain Septenar (Detached from 13 line stanza?)	Later interpolation (Lyle) Master (Cady?)



[The capture of Jesus. Peter cuts off Malcus' ear. Jesus heals it. The soldiers bring Jesus to Pilate]	quatrain Septenar	A fourth author, different from any other hitherto (Davidson) York borrowing (Pollard, Cady)
Pilate asks if this is the one who has wrought them such wrong by raising Lazarus from the dead, walking on the sea, and healing the deaf and dumb. Jesus passes Caesar or Herod. (st. 117-118; ll. 712-21)	8 line Septenar	Parent-cycle (Lyle)
[1 Miles suggests killing Jesus then and there] Pilate knows a better counsel. (st. 119; ll. 726-27)	quatrain septenar	York borrowing (Pollard) Parent-cycle (Lyle) Quatrain editor (Cady)
[Malcus demands that Jesus be killed] Pilate curses the soldiers. Will you privately murder a man? (st. 122; ll. 736-37)		
[Malcus grumbles] Pilate commands the soldiers to take Jesus to Caia- phas, who has rule over the church, for Jesus has violated "our" law. (st. 123-24; ll. 740-45)		

*THE BUFFETING (XXI)*

After Caiaphas bids the Torturers to take Jesus to Pilate, he fears "lest pylate for mede let ihesus go." He wishes he had slain Jesus. All had been quit then. "Gyftys marres many men."

(st. 49; ll. 433-41)

Master (all)

9 line Wakefield

*THE SCOURGING (XXII)*

Pilate opens with a boasting speech. Let everyone keep quiet but himself. He is full of subtlety, falsehood, guilt, and treachery, wherefor he is called "mali actoris" by the clergy.

Like the hammer striking both sides of the iron, so does he with the law. He inclines first to the right side, then to the wrong, according as he is bribed. All false indictors, questgoers, jurors, and out-riders are welcome to him. (cf. XX, ll. 24-27)

This prophet Christ will come before him. He will pretend to be Christ's friend, but before night Christ will hang on the cross. Backbiters and slanderers are Pilate's delights.

Nothing grieves him more than to hear of this Christ and his new laws. Though he be never so

"Foreign introduction" (Davidson)  
Fourth group: Revision by Master  
(Lyle)  
Master (Carey)

13 line abababab  
cdddc

“Foreign introduction” (Davidson)  
 Fourth group: Revision by Master  
 (Lyle)  
 Master (Carey)

13 line stanza

true in works and words, Christ will suffer much  
 mischief. Shedding Christian blood is Pilate's  
 greatest solace. Lo! here come the knights with  
 Christ.

(st. 1-4; ll. 1-52)

[Torturers bring in Christ. 3 Torturer asks his  
 death.]

Pilate asks what? without council? He can find no  
 wrong in Jesus. The shame of the world will be  
 upon them if they slay Jesus. Herod could find no  
 fault in him. Pilate will not have anything to do  
 with him, but let him go.

(st. 8-10; ll. 87-106)

[1 Counsellor accuses Jesus of calling himself king]  
 Pilate reminds Jesus of his power to condemn.

(st. 11; ll. 112-15)

[Jesus: you have no power except from my Father]  
 Pilate remembers that it is customary to offer a thief  
 at this time.

(st. 12; ll. 118-21)

[The Jews choose Barrabas]

Master (all)

9 line Wakefield



Master (all)

9 line Wakefield

Pilate commands them to strip Jesus, make his body bleed, and beat him black and blue.

(st. 13; ll. 125-26)

[The scourging and buffeting]

Pilate asks Jesus why he will not cry mercy. Pilate wants to see a miracle. Asks why the Jews want to kill Jesus. The Jews blame Jesus greatly, else he would escape from Pilate.

(st. 20; ll. 188-96)

[Counsellor accuses Jesus of calling himself king]

Pilate asks why the Jews will not obey their king.

(st. 22; ll. 206-08)

[“Caesar is our king”]

Pilate washes his hands and condemns Jesus.

(st. 23; ll. 215-23)

### THE CRUCIFIXION (XXIII)

Pilate opens with a ranting speech calling for silence.

(st. 1; ll. 1-8)

Editorial addition (Cady)

Editing of original cycle (Pollard)

Probable revision of parent-cycle  
(Lyle)

Threatens "harlottys and dustardys" to hang them on the gallows unless they are silent. (st. 2; ll. 6-21)	13 line ababcbcbdecccd	Stanza 2 by Master (Carey)
He is a great lord, prince of all Jewry, next only to King Herod. Therefore beware. (st. 3; ll. 22-28)	7 line aabbcbc	Editorial addition or revision (Cady, Pollard, Lyle)
[The torturers object to the inscription on the cross] Pilate tells them to mind their own business. What he has written, he has written. (st. 85; ll. 552-57)	6 line irregular <i>rime couée</i>	Original stratum (Pollard?) Parent-cycle (Lyle) (Note verbal parallelism to York XXXVI, ll. 14-17)
[The torturers think that as a lawyer, Pilate must have his way. He would not have written without proper skill]	Couplet with internal rime or quatrain in fourteeners	
[Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea beg the body of Jesus]		
Pilate welcomes Joseph. (st. 99; ll. 634-36)	<i>rime couée</i>	Original stratum (Pollard?) Parent-cycle (Lyle)
[Joseph asks for the body] Pilate grants him the body, if Jesus is dead. Joseph may do with it as he thinks good. (st. 100; ll. 640-42)		

## TALENTS (XXIV)

Pilate boasts of his power in a mixture of Latin and English. He calls for silence and proclaims his power and parentage. King Atus begot him of Pila. Caesar has exalted him, and all must obey. He is "atrox arripotens."	(st. 1-5; ll. 1-46)	9 line Master's (an extra line in <i>frons</i> of st. 5)	Master (all) <i>Talents</i> is subject of older York Play and may represent "the parent form" (Lyle) Whole play of <i>Talents</i> shows Master's hand (Davidson, Pollard, Gayley, Cady, Carey?) Basic Play, derived from a discarded York Play (Frampton)
He will hang anybody who does not bow to "our" law.	(st. 6; ll. 47-54)	8 line ababcdcd	Basic Play (Frampton)
Let everybody obey his pleasure.	(st. 7; ll. 55-59)	5 line a <sup>2</sup> bbba <sup>3</sup>	Stanzas 6-9 Master's (Cady)
Talk not a word.	(st. 8; ll. 60-64)	8 line	Interpolation (Frampton)
Commands the boy to lay him down softly and see that he is not disturbed.	(st. 9; ll. 65-72)	8 line <i>rime couée</i>	
[The three torturers enter one after the other in haste. They have brought Jesus' clothes, which they want Pilate to divide]			



Third Torturer afraid that Pilate will take the "gown."	(st. 21; ll. 161-64)	quatrain	Basic Play (Frampton)
First Torturer swears Pilate will not get the gown.	(st. 22; ll. 165-69)	5 line ababc (c an actor insertion?)	Basic Play (Frampton)
[The Counsellor agrees to awaken Pilate]			
Pilate tells Counsellor to call no more.	(st. 26; ll. 183-86)	quatrain a <sup>2</sup> bba <sup>1</sup>	
Pilate asks who bothers him and whether anyone is disaffected.	(st. 27; ll. 187-89)	quatrain	
Pilate asks to be annoyed no more, but finally goes to his seat in the hall.		7 line abab <sup>4</sup> c <sup>2</sup> bc <sup>4</sup>	
Pilate threatens the Counsellor if his report of Jesus' death is untrue.	(st. 28; ll. 191-97)	quatrain	
[Counsellor assures him that Jesus is dead]	(st. 29; ll. 198-201)		
Pilate reprimands the Counsellor for meddling in such affairs.	(st. 31; ll. 209-15)	7 line	

## Basic Play (Frampton)

[Counsellor defends himself]

Pilate mocks him: he doesn't know the way of  
kings. 5 line

(st. 33; ll. 233-39)

[First Torturer reports the death of Jesus] 7 line

Pilate is glad to hear it, but tells them to keep it  
quiet.

(st. 36; ll. 245-46)

[Third Torturer asks whether Pilate claims the  
clothes]

Pilate immediately claims them.

(st. 36; ll. 245-46)

[First Torturer objects]

Pilate asks for the gown as a gift.

(st. 37; ll. 250-51)

[Second Torturer objects]

Pilate says he is master.

(st. 38; l. 254)

Frampton restores st.

38 and 39 to one 7  
line stanza

[Third Torturer proposes to cut the garments into  
pieces]

Pilate agrees and indicates the parts.

(st. 38–39; ll. 256–58)

[First Torturer doesn't like his share]

Pilate insists he has been fairly treated.

(st. 40; ll. 262)

[All three Torturers are discontented]

Pilate grudgingly gives them the gown to divide.

(st. 41; ll. 269–70)

[The torturers cannot find a seam along which to divide it]

Pilate commands them not to cut the garment.

(st. 42; ll. 281–82)

[First Torturer objects]

Pilate swears at him; the garment must remain whole.

(st. 43; l. 284)

[Third Torturer tries to mollify Pilate]

Pilate says if he thought the First Torturer spoke spitefully, Pilate would kill him.

(st. 43; ll. 286–87)





[Second Torturer exclaims "here ar a hepe"]

Pilate tells them to pay close attention to the number of spots.

(st. 48; l. 316)

[Third Torturer says Pilate has thrown thirteen]

Pilate says he will win, or all had better beware.

(st. 48; l. 318)

[First Torturer, after exhortation, throws]

Pilate mocks him; he has thrown only eight.

(st. 49; ll. 322-23)

[First Torturer curses the dice; Second Torturer says he supposes Pilate has won]

Pilate says it will be a sorry pass if Second Torturer wins.

(st. 50; l. 329)

[Second Torturer throws seven, but Third Torturer, after bidding the "byched bones" do better, throws fifteen]

Pilate is angry. Why does he whistle? Pilate forbids the throw.

(st. 52; ll. 339-40)

## Basic Play (Frampton)

7 line

[Third Torturer protests that he has won fairly and First Torturer supports him]

Pilate is not satisfied. Third Torturer blew on the dice.  
(st. 53; ll. 346-48)

[Third Torturer prepares to depart with the garment]

Pilate asks that, since the Third Torturer won the garment, he give it to Pilate.  
(st. 54; ll. 351-52)

[Third Torturer refuses]

Pilate threatens him.

(st. 54; ll. 354-56)

[Third Torturer gives up the garment]

Pilate thanks him and promises repayment.

(st. 54-55; ll. 360-61)

[First Torturer says he wouldn't have given up the garment so lightly]

Pilate replies that the Third Torturer is "faithful and fre" and will be amended.

(st. 55; ll. 363-66)

Frampton restores 10  
line stanza to 7  
line

7 line



[Three Torturers moralize on the evils of gambling] 9 line Master's Master (all)  
 Pilate praises the Torturers as most cunning clerks 9 line (without inter- Master (Carey)  
 and blesses them in French. nal rime in *frons*) Editorial addition (Frampton)

### THE RESURRECTION (XXVI)

Since Towneley XXVI is one of the five plays identical with York Plays on parallel subjects, the method of analysis used in the preceding pages is without great usefulness. Except for the first speech of Pilate, all the scenes in which Pilate appears are the same in both Towneley and York, and all are in the Burns stanza (aaa<sup>4</sup>b<sup>2</sup>a<sup>4</sup>b<sup>2</sup>). The only difference of opinion among critics is whether the play is borrowed from York (all except Lyle), or belongs to a parent-cycle (Lyle). Instead of the analysis used for the preceding plays, I have, therefore, put the synopsis of the Towneley Play in one column, and in the other, noted any variations from York.

#### TOWNELEY

Pilate calls for silence and threatens those who will not cease their cry. He is Pilate, who has "all to-torne" Jesus. He is glad of his deed and wants to know if any follow Jesus. If there are any, they will hang high on the gallows. They will be tormented and the devil will harry their ghosts.

(st. 1-6; ll. 1-36)

#### YORK VARIANTS

Pilate commands all to do his bidding. Tells Caiaphas that, since he has followed Caiaphas' counsel about Jesus, he will stand by his deed.

[Caiaphas says the deed was lawful, and must be maintained]

Pilate says it is needful to speak of the deed. No news has come since the burial of Jesus.

[Caiaphas says Centurion has been left to arrest ribalds.  
Centurion soliloquizes on the marvels he has seen,  
Jesus was the Son of God. The Jews were wrong.]

Pilate greets Centurion.

(st. 12; ll. 76-77)

Pilate asks for tidings.

(st. 13; ll. 80-83)

[Centurion says they have done ill. Caiaphas asks explanation of his words. Centurion says they have slain a righteous man.]

Pilate tells him to cease such saws. Centurion is a great man, and ought to support Pilate and the high priests.

(st. 15; ll. 92-97)

[Centurion prefers to maintain truth. Jesus was God's son. Annas says Centurion will rue such reasons. Centurion says he saw wonders. Caiaphas asks for information, and Centurion supplies it.]

Pilate warns the Centurion to beware. The clerks call what he saw an eclipse.

(st. 20; ll. 123-27)

[Caiaphas adds that the dead rose by sorcery. Centurion determined to believe what he saw.]

Pilate protests that such tales will bring "us" trouble. Calls Centurion "harlot" and tells him to get out.

(st. 22-23; ll. 138-43)

[Caiaphas also orders Centurion to leave. Centurion says that, since they will not believe him, he will leave.]

Pilate remarks that such wonderful reasons were never before.

(st. 25; ll. 150-51)

[Caiaphas and Annas are worried, afraid that the disciples will steal the body to fulfill Jesus' prophecy of resurrection. They advise a watch on the tomb.]

Pilate agrees. He will prevent any resurrection if he may. Commands knights to guard the body well unto the third day, so that no traitor can steal it. He threatens them with death if they fail.

(st. 31-33; ll. 184-201)



- [Boasting of the soldiers]
- [The Resurrection]
- [The soldiers go to Pilate with the news of the Resurrection]
- Pilate welcomes them and asks for news.  
(st. 83; ll. 496-99)
- [Soldiers tell him that Jesus is risen]
- Pilate curses them and calls them cowards.  
(st. 84-85; ll. 506-09)
- [Soldiers explain that they could not prevent it; they were frightened]
- Pilate asks, did he rise by himself alone?  
(st. 86; l. 518)
- [Yes, says second soldier]
- Pilate: alas, our laws are forlorn!  
(st. 87; l. 525)
- Asks Caiaphas for advice.  
(st. 88; ll. 526-29)
- [Caiaphas has none. Annas suggests that Pilate bribe the soldiers to keep them silent]
- Speech given to Caiaphas in York.
- Omitted.

Pilate accepts the advice. Tells the soldiers to say that ten thousand men took the corpse. For this, he gives them ten thousand pounds.

(st. 90-93; ll. 541-56)

[First soldier promises to tell the story everywhere]

Pilate gives them the blessing of Mahound.

(st. 94; l. 562)

Annas suggests the details of the bribe: the number of attackers was "xxti m<sup>i</sup> men and mo" and the reward is £1000.

A closing speech by Pilate that truth will be bought and sold.





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